

Before Orientalism

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Asian Peoples and Cultures in
European Travel Writing, 1245-1510

KIM M. PHILLIPS



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in European Travel Writing, 1245–1510

Kim M. Phillips

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For John, Heloise, and Sylvie

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Note on the Text

All English-speaking authors in this field find themselves compromised by the problem of spelling proper nouns. As a broad guide, I generally follow the forms employed in John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg, eds., with Scott D. Westrem, associate editor, and Gregory G. Guzman, collaborating editor, *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 2000). Chinese places and names are given in Pinyin without tone marks. Where there is potential for confusion, especially with regard to place-names, the medieval author's spelling is included as well as a currently accepted form. No doubt some readers will be dissatisfied with the results, but I hope that all will be able to recognize the people and locations mentioned or find them in a reference work or map.

When using abbreviated forms of medieval European authors' names I include only the most distinctive part of the name (usually Anglicized). Christian names are generally preferred over bynames, but not surnames, except where the Christian name is too common to avert confusion: thus: Carpini rather than John, Rubruck rather than William, but Ricold and Jordan rather than Monte Croce and Catala. When an author is infrequently referred to or no part of his name is memorable, the whole is preferred (for example, Benedict the Pole, Andrew of Perugia).

In the text, quotes are generally given in English translation. The translations have been compared with the original text in the edition named in the endnotes and modified in some instances. To save space, the original Latin, French, Franco-Italian, or other wording is only briefly quoted, whether in the text or endnotes, when likely to be of special interest. References to the main primary texts in the endnotes are generally given by medieval author and now commonly used title, with book and chapter numbers or other subdivisions where available, followed in parenthesis to page references to the edition of the original language used and (in most cases) to an English translation. Where I have modified a translation or provided my own, this is made clear.

Introduction

I speak and speak, but the listener retains only the words he is expecting. The description of the world to which you lend a benevolent ear is one thing; the description that will go the rounds of the groups of stevedores and gondoliers on the street outside my house the day of my return is another; and yet another, that which I might dictate late in life, if I were taken prisoner by Genoese pirates and put in irons in the same cell with a writer of adventure stories. It is not the voice that commands the story: it is the ear.¹

To write a book is to make a journey. Yet as is so often the case with travel, the final destination may look quite different from what was initially imagined. In the early stages of research for this book, influenced by some recent studies on travel writing, I thought the distant parts of Asia might represent “a location of definitive Otherness” for late medieval European writers and readers. However, I have since moved far from that view, having found that the end location has a much more varied landscape than first envisaged.

This book examines European travel writing on central, east, south, and southeast Asia composed or in circulation from around 1245 to around 1510. “Orient,” “Asia,” “far East” (with lowercase “f”), “distant East,” and “farther East” will be employed as synonyms encompassing the whole area under discussion with due acknowledgment of the difficulties of these labels. Terms such as “Orient” and “East” have become problematic for modern commentators who rightly point to their geographic assumptions (“East” from where?), ideological baggage, and pejorative or romantic connotations. Yet to medieval Europeans the lands of Asia were literally in the distant “East” of their world. The book deals with descriptions of places we now call Mongolia, China, India, and Southeast Asia. It largely excludes the Holy Land and surrounding regions on the grounds that western Europe’s relations with middle eastern (and, indeed, northern African and southern Iberian) people were shaped by Christian rhetoric that sought to emphasize the religious basis of relations with, and alienation from, Islam and Judaism to a greater extent than discourse on cultures further east. Although Christian crusading rhetoric and anti-Judaic traditions had their own complexities—indeed, were not univocally damning—one

cannot deny the persistence of later medieval Christian tendencies to condemn most stridently the religious and cultural traditions closest to its own.² John Tolan is among a number of scholars who have commented on Christianity's harsher treatment of Judaism and Islam than more distant faiths, such as Animism and Buddhism, with whom they would seem to have less in common: "It is precisely because Christians and Jews [and Muslims] are fighting for rightful ownership of a common spiritual heritage that their disputes are so bitter."³ Geographical proximity and military threats may similarly raise tensions. As we will see, Europeans were most hostile in portrayals of Mongols in the early to mid-thirteenth century when the physical peril of "Tartars" was nearest.

This book does not tell the travelers' stories of discovery again, apart from some necessary background material on authors, books, and audiences, nor is it a history of exploration and discovery. It does not treat the travelers' narratives as sources of information on Asian cultures historians might use to supplement or support what they have learned from non-European sources. Rather, it attempts something different: a cultural history of aspects of the encounter between late medieval Latin Christians and Asian cultures with a focus on themes that have not usually been granted headline attention. In particular, it asks how prevailing European preoccupations with food and eating habits, gender roles, sexualities, civility, and the human body helped shape late medieval perspectives on eastern peoples and societies. It aims to contribute to European cultural history, not Asian history. Its central argument is for a distinctive European perspective on Asia during the era c. 1245–c. 1510. Attitudes were moving away from tendencies to create a homogenous "India" of marvels and monsters yet were little touched by the colonialist mentalities that would emerge through the early modern era and dominate the modern. It argues that desire for information and for pleasure were two chief impulses guiding late medieval readers' interest in travel writing on Asia. In regard to the first motivation, some authors supplied specific information to help with immediate military and evangelical necessities. Other travelers, particularly when writing on China, sought to satisfy a more generalized hunger for knowledge about civilized living that pervaded late medieval bourgeois and noble life. Readers' appetites for pleasure were also variously satisfied. Some representations of eastern peoples fulfilled the urge to wonder, which has been noted as an important characteristic of medieval cultures, while other elements of their descriptions met desires for amusement or delight. Monstrosity or alien customs were comprehended within ancient conventions on the "barbarian" and could assist an emerging European sense of selfhood or in some cases provide a kind of

pleasure through horror.

Some studies of Christian engagement with Islam and Judaism have justifiably spoken of a “medieval Orientalism” identifiable in literature, art, and learned texts—a particularly valid approach given the middle eastern focus of Edward Said’s work and his neglect of medieval testimonies—and a few have extended the term to medieval travelers’ characterizations of Mongolian and east Asian peoples.⁴ As I will show in Chapter 1, the “Before” of my title is potentially provocative but is not meant as a quarrel with those who have explored all the complex configurations that western Orientalism can take. In arguing that the term, in the ways it is defined by Said, is a mainly postmedieval development, my title points to the distinctiveness of late medieval views on the peoples and cultures of the distant East before concerted colonialist ventures were initiated. While Muslims and Jews occupied regions throughout Asia, and indeed Muslims were becoming dominant in places such as India under the Delhi Sultanate and the islands of southeast Asia, the animosity characterizing Christians’ perspective loses some of its sting in the travel narratives dealing with places in the distant East. In the latter, Jews and Muslims were among many religious groups including Buddhists, Confucians, Hindus, Animists, Shamanists, and Nestorian Christians, and battles over territory or holy sites were irrelevant. To be sure, differences between perspectives on nearer and more distant Easts were never absolute and Christian rhetoric (for example, against “idolaters”) naturally had some role in shaping the latter. The relevance of traditions of crusader and pilgrim discourse for works that also deal with a farther Orient is perhaps seen best in *The Book of John Mandeville*, the first part of which incorporates pilgrim narratives and presents Jerusalem as the center of the world, seeks the garden of Eden at the earth’s eastern edge, and constructs a world image dominated by spiritual concerns. This overflow of narratives concerning the Saracen Orient and realms further east will occasionally be noted in the thematic chapters that make up [Part 2](#). Yet where Christian perspectives on closer peoples were formed out of religious confrontation, late medieval Europeans’ reactions to the peoples of India, Mongolia, and *l’extrême orient* were more often dominated by pleasure, pragmatic fears, and curiosity.

Late medieval Europeans were no strangers to colonialist enterprises, but few were seriously contemplating such ventures in the ancient civilizations of the distant East. A concise definition of “colonialism” may be helpful, such as one provided by Christopher LaMonica: “The term *colonialism* refers to a process of domination of one group (the colonizing *metropole* or *core*) over another (a colonized *other* or *periphery*).”⁵ Jürgen Osterhammel’s summary is also incisive:

Colonialism is a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule.⁶

Of course colonialism and colonization take different forms and do not always, even in the modern period, involve formal domination of a metropolitan center over a subjected territorial possession. “Informal” or “surrogate” empires, such as seen in nineteenth-century British relations with China, should be included in any history of colonialism and imperialism. Osterhammel also identifies a wider range of expansionary activities to be counted in a theory of colonialism: “total migration of entire populations and societies”; “mass individual migration”; “border colonization”; “overseas settlement colonization”; “empire-building wars of conquest”; and “construction of naval networks”; and he divides “colonies” into “exploitation colonies,” “maritime enclaves,” and “settlement colonies.”⁷ In recent years historians have amply documented processes of conquest and colonization within the boundaries of Latin Christendom and on its margins. Thus, taking some notable examples, Frankish crusaders in the Holy Land, Spanish Christians in Iberia, Normans in England, Anglo-Normans in Wales and Ireland, Germans in Bohemia, Catalans and Genoese in the Mediterranean, and Castilians and Portuguese in the Atlantic may all be viewed as medieval colonizers of some sort.⁸ Expansion and settlement were recurring features of medieval European experience. Yet despite flexibility in definition, it is difficult to identify examples of European colonialist ambition toward the distant East before the late fifteenth century. There were certainly western mercantile and missionary presences as far away as India and China from the later thirteenth century and those endeavors no doubt paved the way for later settlements, but it is hard to discern a European desire to possess and subjugate Asian territories in the fashion familiar to more recent epochs.

For these reasons, the book is envisaged as a contribution to an emergent “precolonial studies” rather than the better-established work on medieval “postcolonialism” that has emerged over the past decade and a half.⁹ Said’s theory of Orientalism was instrumental in the formation of postcolonial theory more broadly, although earlier works by Frantz Fanon and critics of the British Raj were also among its foundational texts. The theory takes awareness of the inequality and injustice inherent in relations in any given colonial context as its starting point.¹⁰ Medieval postcolonialism, far from being a “mind-bending” concept,¹¹ is a valid and important field that still offers scope for more detailed studies. For example, early medieval societies,

as some recent scholars have helped us see, possessed languages, buildings, law codes, and mental outlooks marked by their then recent status as Roman colonies.¹² Many studies offer subtle engagements that problematize any rigid concept of what counts as “postcolonial” and critique the work of Said, Bhabha, and others. Yet chronologies may be synchronous; thus medieval society was at once “colonial,” with various colonialist enterprises under way in different times and places, and “postcolonial,” having gone through numerous such processes already, but also “precolonial,” in that not all of Latin Christendom’s encounters with other peoples were driven by a colonialist impulse.

Perhaps the closest medieval powers came to pursuing informal colonial enterprises in the distant East was in missionary endeavors and the expansionist ambitions of the popes directing them. From the mid-thirteenth to late fifteenth centuries, the papacy sent Franciscan and Dominican missionaries to convert Asian populations to the Catholic faith. We might argue for a culturally colonialist *motive* in these efforts at evangelization; however, we would also need to acknowledge that nothing close to actual dominance of the Christian faith was ever achieved. The missionary efforts were tiny and scattered among vast and mainly unreceptive Asian populations. The latter’s overwhelmingly indifferent response is notorious among Asian historians who point to the lack of oriental records of the western visitors. The notable exception was John of Marignolli (in China in the 1330s and 1340s), who made an impression on Chinese annalists not for the Christian message he sought to deliver but for the huge horse he brought as a present for the emperor.¹³ Moreover, although missionary work has often gone hand in hand with modern colonialism, we should recognize certain specific agendas and contexts among medieval missionaries.¹⁴ One of the chief concerns of Franciscans was a belief in an imminent apocalypse. Thus Franciscan missionaries to China, India, and other distant civilizations aimed to achieve the conversion of humankind to Catholic Christianity, even if it meant their own martyrdom, before the end of the world. Dominican friars, particularly active in central and west Asia and in India, regularly attempted to draw eastern branches of Christianity (such as Nestorian and Armenian Christians) into the Latin fold or to convert Mongols to Christianity to gain allies in crusades against Islam. The efforts of both groups *might* be read as ideological colonialism, but only with numerous provisos in place. The difference between medieval and more recent missionaries is well summarized by E. Randolph Daniel, who explains medieval Christians’ evangelizing efforts in light of concepts of *societas christiana*: When non-Christians “adopted Catholicism, they were accepted into the

corpus christianorum. ... This is not to be confused with the attitude of nineteenth-century missionaries who believed that they were civilizing as well as Christianizing Africans and Asians. Conversion to Christianity in the nineteenth century simply included the acceptance of the superiority of European civilization; it did not incorporate those converted *into* European civilization” in the way that medieval conversion assumed assimilation within the *societas christiana*.¹⁵ There are fundamental differences between medieval missions in Asia and more recent efforts accompanying economic, political, and settler expansion.

The absence of a true colonizing agenda among late medieval travelers to the distant East and their readers back home created a vision of Asia that admitted neutrality and often admiration as well as critique. This is hardly a new observation: there is a distinguished body of scholarship on different aspects of the topic.¹⁶ Its influence has begun to have some effect on medieval Europeanists beyond the fields of travel and encounter; for example, Georges Duby notes that in the wake of the testimony of emissaries to the Mongols, Marco Polo, and other travelers, “a few Europeans began to perceive that the extremities of the world were not all populated by cruel monsters and that order, wealth and happiness could prevail, under wise monarchs, in countries that were not Christian.”¹⁷ The goal here is to revisit the field with greater attention to some topics that have come into prominence with the rise of cultural anthropology. Alongside medieval travel writers’ efforts to paint eastern peoples and cultures as “Other,” we will find plenty of occasions when they noted sameness or at least similarities between East and West. Admiration and the willingness to learn are found, too, and where authors denigrated particular Asian cultures their attitude can be explained by the motives of authors and expectations of their audiences. For instance, much writing on Mongols up to the later thirteenth century was dominated by perceptions of ferocious enemies (actual or potential) and was additionally influenced by ancient prejudices against nomadic or non-urban “barbarians.” Some of the latter stereotypes also affected portrayals of rural southeast Asians down to the end of our period. In contrast, most medieval writing on China was full of admiration and appealed to audiences’ desire to revel in descriptions of natural bounty and civilized pleasures. Descriptions of India were varied, encompassing the full range of medieval responses to eastern contexts from enchantment to disgust.

Europeans had been traveling to ancient civilizations of the distant East long before they made journeys to the “new” worlds of the Americas and Oceania. Xenophon’s expedition to Persia c. 400 BCE and Alexander the Great’s advances across Persia and into India in the

330s–320s BCE endured in European memory. Alexander’s campaign was transformed into literature and mythology in Pseudo-Callisthenes’s *Alexander Romance*, composed in the third century CE and popular throughout the medieval period.¹⁸ Roman traders had sailed into the Indian Ocean from the first century CE and maintained trading posts as far as the Bay of Bengal. According to J. R. S. Phillips, “Roman products and occasionally even Roman subjects could be found as far afield as South-East Asia and China,” while Asian products including silk and spices were traded westward.¹⁹ Roman geographer Pomponius Mela wrote c. 43 CE, “The Seres [Chinese] are ... a people full of justice and best known for the trade they conduct in absentia, by leaving their goods behind in a remote location.”²⁰ Pliny the Elder stated he had heard from an Indian delegation that the Chinese “are of more than normal height, and have flaxen hair and blue eyes [*rutilis comis, caeruleis oculis*], and they speak in harsh tones and use no language in dealing with the travellers.”²¹ Mela commented on the peoples of India, emphasizing their diversity. He says their dress and customs vary a great deal, from linen or wool to the skins of birds or animals to complete nakedness or covering only of private parts. “Some are short and puny, others so tall and huge in body that routinely and with ease they use even elephants—the biggest ones there—in the same way we use horses.” Some think it wrong to eat any kind of meat, others eat only fish, and still others kill and eat their ailing parents. Some withdraw from society to die quietly, while others hasten death by hurling themselves on fires.²² Evidently, reliable information had to contend with rumor, exaggeration, and outright fiction from the earliest days of East-West contact.

European travel beyond the eastern Mediterranean slowed to a trickle after the decline of the western Roman Empire and Islam’s advances in the seventh and eighth centuries. Pilgrimages (and, from 1096, crusades) kept up eastward passage of Europeans to the Holy Land, but the way to the more distant Orient was ventured by few before the rise of the Mongol Empire from the early thirteenth century. Benjamin of Tudela, a Navarrese Jew, managed to travel to Basra in the second half of the twelfth century and in his narrative mentioned lands as far east as China without benefit of eyewitness experience. His section on China (“Zin”) amounts to only a legend of the Sea of “Nikpa,” where ingenious sailors ensure their safety in fierce winds by making themselves false prey for “griffins.” On India, he says only that the land is very mountainous and contains many Jewish communities.²³ After Temüjin, renamed Chinggis (“Genghis”) Khân (c. 1167–1227), had united the tribes of central Asia by 1206, the Mongols steadily conquered territories stretching from Hungary to

Korea. In the 1220s, 1230s, and early 1240s, terror touched Europe as the Mongols ravaged Russia, Hungary, and Poland. A chronicler of Novgorod conveyed the foreboding: “The same year [1224], for our sins, unknown tribes came, whom no one exactly knows, who they are, nor whence they came out, nor what their language is, nor of what race they are, nor what their faith is, but they call them Tartars.”²⁴ Realms as far west as France trembled before the threat of conquest. In Gregory Guzman’s view, “It was clear that no military power in Europe was capable of withstanding the Mongols, who could easily have marched to the Atlantic if they had wanted to do so.”²⁵ A new era opened with the death of Ögödei in December 1241 when ensuing internal divisions among Mongols contributed to the halt of their westward advances. From 1245 to the mid-fourteenth century, during the perhaps ill-named Pax Mongolica, Mongolian policies of controlled dialogue with external powers complemented European attempts to build alliances in their crusades against Islam. The result was the Mongol Empire’s opening to a number of Latin emissaries, missionaries, and merchants.²⁶

The heyday of medieval land-based travels to the far Orient was the mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century. A decisive factor in the decline of eastern travel was the Ming dynasty’s seizure of Mongol-held China in 1368 and its initial hostility to Christianity. Despite gradual closure of land routes, some travelers continued to find their way east on Arab ships bound for India and the Spice Islands. Yet perhaps the most significant development of the fourteenth century took place not on sea or land but in the European imagination, with the growing popular and scholarly taste for tales of oriental lands. In the epigraph to this chapter, Italo Calvino’s Marco Polo tells his Mongol host, “It is not the voice that commands the story: it is the ear.” European audiences, not least Marco Polo’s, were developing a sense of what they wished to hear about the distant East and commanded that certain tales be told.

The present book is based on written or dictated accounts of more than twenty European men who traveled or claimed to have traveled to Mongolia, China, India, Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), and southeast Asia from around 1245 to 1510 or who wrote important associated texts.²⁷ Of these, the works by John of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, Ricold of Monte Croce, John of Monte Corvino, Hetoum of Armenia, Jordan Catala of Sévérac, Odoric of Pordenone, John of Marignolli, “Sir John Mandeville,” and Niccolò dei Conti, as well as *The Letter of Prester John*, have been most useful. The selection by no means represents every medieval text dealing with the far Orient but provides fair coverage of western European works that may be gathered under the heading of travel writing (to be

defined in Chapter 3). Descriptions of eastern contexts in learned encyclopedic works are also relevant but used here only for purposes of comparison or to identify sources or results of some travelers' perceptions. Many other Latin Christians made similar journeys during the period, but most did not leave written accounts.²⁸ I also pay attention to the texts' known or likely audiences, the cultural contexts within which they found a foothold, and the broader impact of their oriental descriptions. Some of the travelers and pseudo-travelers had large medieval reading publics while others were almost completely obscure before the modern era, and where many of the sources amount to only a few pages others fill whole volumes in modern editions. Some authors (such as Carpini, Rubruck, and Monte Corvino) produced accounts by their own hands that can *mostly*, but never entirely, be trusted as eyewitness statements. Certain authors (such as Ricold and Marignolli) worked alone but on texts affected by circumstances in their motives for production. Several others (notably Marco Polo, Odoric, and Niccolò) worked with amanuenses who had not been to Asia to produce hybrid works of unstable authorship and sometimes dubious veracity. A notorious few (especially "Mandeville," Witte, and the author of *The Letter of Prester John*) were solo authors of books founded in plagiarism and imagination. Even the apparently faithful eyewitness accounts are not always reliable as they often include hearsay material and snippets of older myths of the Orient, and all the works are complicated by the processes of textual transmission, scribal alteration, and the metamorphoses wrought by translation. The words "travelers" and "authors" are in this context sometimes only loose terms of convenience. Each author and his work are discussed in Chapter 2.

Medieval travelers' accounts of Asia have interested scholars for centuries. The Italian Giambattista Ramusio (1485–1557) and Englishmen Richard Hakluyt (c. 1552–1616) and Samuel Purchas (c. 1577–1626), the first travel anthologists of the age of print, published the travelogues of several medieval authors; Purchas, for example, included versions of Rubruck, Polo, Hetoum, "Mandeville," and Niccolò in his anthology.²⁹ Luke Wadding (1558–1657), an Irish Franciscan, published the letters of the early fourteenth-century Franciscan missionaries to China, which might otherwise have sunk into obscurity. From the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century Sir Henry Yule, Anastasius van den Wyngaert, A. C. Moule, Paul Pelliot, Christopher Dawson, and various editors for the Hakluyt Society produced translations and editions. The emergent discipline of geography had its own historians, notably C. R. Beazley, whose three-volume *Dawn of Modern Geography* (1897–1906) discussed most of these medieval travelers and provided information on surviving

manuscripts. The later twentieth century also saw publication of a number of essential studies of late medieval contact with Asia.³⁰ The key words of many works on premodern travels, especially those dealing with the Renaissance era of c. 1400–c. 1600, are “exploration,” “discovery,” and “expansion,” as evident from titles of key works.³¹ A strong theme of existing scholarship is the wish to place exploration by early modern European travelers to the Americas in a longer context, showing the later travelers were the heirs of a long medieval tradition.³² However, if we read medieval travelers’ accounts of Asia primarily within the framework of a longer history of expansion and conquest, we will find much within their writings that seems not to fit. More recent works have begun to emphasize the distinctive nature of late medieval travel writing on the East.³³ The travelers’ names are bound to become recognized among a still broader readership in medieval European studies (Asianists, of course, know them all well already), with the present renewal of interest in histories of travel and encounter.

The geographical boundaries of this study are harder to draw than the chronological ones. The eastern, southern, and northern edges of the territory included are not so difficult, as none of the travelers went east of Hangzhou and the East China Sea, north of the Altai Mountains, or south of Java. Marco Polo includes a description of Japan (Cipangu) in his book, but it is based on secondhand accounts. Carpini and Polo offer descriptions of the lands and peoples of mysterious northern realms but did not visit them. The western boundary is more difficult to draw. As a rough guide, I focus on regions east of the Indus valley, but it has sometimes been relevant to mention parts of the Mongol Empire west of that line for the purposes of discussing Mongol peoples and cultures. In addition, some descriptions of places or peoples, such as Temür’s (Tamerlane’s) court at Samarkand, the legendary “Isles of Men and Women” located somewhere south of the Arabian peninsula, and Odoric’s (and Mandeville’s) account of the men of Ormuz, are included. In essence, the geographical region covered consists of what medieval authors often referred to as “Nearer” or “Lesser” India (roughly, the northern part of the modern Indian subcontinent), “Further” or “Greater” India (which could cover the southern subcontinent or everything beyond the Ganges, covering Burma/ Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, southeast Asia, and even modern China, depending on the author), and the eastern Mongol Empire.

The first three chapters paint the backdrop. [Chapter 1](#) examines concepts of Orientalism and the East in both medieval and modern perspectives. The second chapter (which scholars with substantial prior knowledge of the texts might choose to skip) provides

information on the travelers and pseudo-travelers with some discussion of the manuscript traditions of their works, circulation, audiences, and influence on subsequent perceptions. The third chapter most fully develops the book's fundamental theses, examining travel writing as a genre; placing medieval writing on the East in the context of a newly forming "Europe" that did not yet invariably view itself as superior; and considering the motivations of travel writers ranging from pragmatism to "wonder." **Part 2 (Chapters 4–8)** embarks on lengthier analyses of key themes: food and foodways, femininities, sex, civility, and bodies. The afterword will briefly make a case for the development of medieval "Precolonial Studies." The selection of chapter topics reflects preoccupations of the medieval authors as well as those of current cultural historians but is far from comprehensive. For example, medieval Europeans' desire for moral and spiritual edification through reading about the religious and ethical systems of Asian cultures deserves detailed separate treatment and is therefore largely set aside for future study.³⁴ This would, I predict, test, extend, and complicate but not undo this book's fundamental arguments. The perception of the Christian faith as true and all others as erroneous led travelers frequently to make pejorative comments on the "idolatrous" or otherwise faulty religious traditions of Asian cultures, and yet their criticism was not as total or always as demonizing as one might expect. Other potential topics such as perceptions of Asian geography, flora, fauna, and minerals, which do tend to emphasize marvels and difference, are also minimized in order to focus more on cultures and peoples.

Medieval travel books allowed readers to turn their gaze to an oriental vista of variety and magnificence. Thus they saw marvels but also much that was ordinary; earthly pleasures as well as terrors; advanced civilizations and primitive ones; Otherness but also Sameness and Similarity. Because they lacked territorial designs on far eastern lands, they rarely assumed the kind of secular Eurocentric superiority we are more familiar with. They were prepared to be impressed by cultures that had reached high standards of civic life, court culture, and social organization, while also reveling in an Orient of fertility, abundance, and sensual pleasure. All the time they retained a willing regard for marvels and the occasional monstrosity. This book tells part of the story of how European people looked at other cultures, the motivations for their interest, and the consequences of their changing gaze. As we engage with medieval accounts of encounter we find diverse responses that complicate our understanding of medieval perceptions of foreign cultures.

PART I

Theory, People, Genres

Chapter 1

On Orientalism

The title *Before Orientalism* is at once a hook, a tease, and a statement of intent. The book could have been called *Alongside Orientalism*, or perhaps *Between Orientalisms*, without alteration to its fundamental arguments. Though Orientalist elements have been identified in medieval representations of Islam and Arab cultures, they apply much less to the rest of Asia. This chapter examines the chronology of the three main strands to Orientalism as they relate to medieval Europe's more distant "Easts." It finds that while elements of two out of the three may be tentatively identified in medieval writings on far eastern places, they do not add up to a version of Orientalism as defined by Said. A developed Orientalist discourse would have to wait until the early modern period or even beyond. Ultimately, late medieval writings on distant Easts are pre-Orientalist primarily because they are precolonialist.

Edward Said offered three interlinked definitions of Orientalism in his classic work. First, the European academic study of Asian societies; second, a tendency to group the diverse cultures of "the East" under one heading and those of "the West" under another to produce the binary distinction of "Orient" and "Occident"; and third—the most controversial one—an ideologically loaded discourse by which western societies have extended, developed, and justified political, economic, and other domination over eastern territories. This third element is best expressed by Said himself: "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, *Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient!*"¹ Lucy Pick notes that the first two elements have, in Said's presentation, an almost timeless, eternal quality, while the third arose in the eighteenth century in response to the "colonial aspirations of post-Enlightenment Europe."² She and other medievalists have queried most aspects of his chronology with regard to the Middle Ages, especially concerning Latin Christendom's

relationship with Islam, but there has been less attention paid to Orientalism's potential application to other Asian regions in the medieval era.

It must be said at the outset that few specialists in Middle Eastern or Asian studies have been persuaded by Said's appraisal of scholarly endeavors by academic Orientalists.³ Indeed, his book has been found to be riddled with errors, flagrant omissions, and drastic overgeneralizations. Some of this critique will be discussed in what follows. On the other hand, Said's concept has had wide utility and application when treated as a tool for interpreting *certain* western representations of subjected cultures, especially in literature and the visual arts, rather than as a reliable guide to entire branches of scholarship. Recurrent themes in cultural Orientalism include a tendency to portray Middle Eastern, North African, and Asian cultures as decadent, decayed, corrupt, and effeminate. Key elements are identified in Dawn Odell's analysis of Jean-Leon Gerome's painting *The Snake Charmer* (c. 1870), a reproduction of which adorned a 1979 edition of Said's *Orientalism*. The painting represents a "European stereotype of the Orient as the site of danger, luxury, effeminacy, degeneration and superstition, including strong suggestions of sodomy, penetration and submission in the central figure of the boy and his position, bare-buttocks to the viewer."⁴ In a colonial context such caricatures of the Orient and its inhabitants helped justify their submission to western powers. That, at least, is the broad argument.

Said focused first on the Middle East and Egypt, though his book makes regular passing references to south and east Asian contexts and his subsequent *Culture and Imperialism* extended the basic premise to colonial contexts including "Africa, India, parts of the Far East, Australia, and the Caribbean."⁵ Other scholars have found his theories relevant, at least as a starting point, in studies of various Asian regions but particularly Japan, China, and India.⁶ Odell's question—"Is *this* the Orient?"—is pertinent, as is her recognition that Said's book posits a distinction between an authentic geographical location and its ideological construction in western representations.⁷ Said admits that his own "awareness of being an 'Oriental' as a child growing up in two British colonies" lies behind his initial Middle Eastern focus. He wanted "to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals. That is why for me the Islamic Orient has had to be the center of attention."⁸ While acknowledging both the narrow and very broad geographical potential of the term, "Orientalism" is examined here primarily in relation to Asian regions beyond the Middle East.

It is in this sense that the book could be retitled *Alongside Orientalism*. Some scholars have explored medieval European

representations of the Islamic East that reveal a tendency to eroticize, romanticize, and/or demonize contemporary Islam. Note, for example, Suzanne Conklin Akbari's wide-ranging recent exploration of a specifically medieval "Orientalism" in representations of Islam and Saracens.⁹ Akbari explains that she excludes European views of east Asia from her study "simply to make clear the extent to which medieval Orientalism was shaped by a very specific discourse of religious alterity centered on the relationship of Christianity to Islam."¹⁰ That is an important distinction, one with which the present book strongly agrees, though by no means does it intend to paint the medieval era as a pre-Orientalist "golden age, free of the representational violence inventoried by Said," as suggested by some medievalists.¹¹

The three elements of Said's "Orientalism" developed over different periods of time, so there cannot really be said to be a single point of origin. Said suggests that the discourse as "a field of learned study" dates to 1312, with the Council of Vienne's decision to establish chairs in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca, but his critics have found this either a little early or too late. Some have suggested the sixteenth or early seventeenth century as a better marker of concerted European scholarship on Oriental themes;¹² others have asserted the Council of Vienne's efforts were "the last salute to a dying ideal" of Christian engagement with Islamic and Jewish philosophy.¹³ Such discussions focus on study of the Middle East, however, and the Islamic world in particular. European academic study of farther eastern cultures came later still.

France's École Spéciale des Langues Orientales, now Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), was founded in 1795 within the Bibliothèque Nationale.¹⁴ French chairs in Chinese were established at the Collège de France in 1814 and École des Langues Orientales in 1843. Munich and Berlin also founded Chinese professorships in the early nineteenth century.¹⁵ France's *Journal Asiatique*, first published in 1823, was slanted more toward coverage of far eastern than Arabic matters, reflecting developing interest in *l'extrême orient* over the course of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ In Britain the first chair in Chinese came in 1837 at University College, London, though it lapsed by 1843, and in 1851 a new one was endowed at King's College, London. Oxford's Bodleian Library began to collect Chinese books in the seventeenth century, but the university did not establish a chair in Chinese until 1876. Cambridge followed in 1886 and Manchester at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁷ U.S. universities would quickly outstrip the British in this field following establishment of a chair at Yale in 1876 and strong

development in the early part of the twentieth century.¹⁸ As T. H. Barrett chronicles in his study of Sinology in Britain, formal academic recognition was preceded by three centuries of book collection by individual European enthusiasts and missionaries and the scholarly endeavors of members of the various East India companies. Indeed, to an extent, scholarly enthusiasm for information on Asia can be seen even in the later Middle Ages given the grouping of writings on eastern contexts in single manuscripts.¹⁹ Yet given that study of Asian languages, which are at the heart of modern Asian studies, was hardly developed before the late eighteenth century, it is clear that formal scholarly interest in the far Orient was a postmedieval phenomenon.

The second sense of Orientalism, as a structure of thought or “imaginative geography” dividing the world between “East” and “West,” “Orient” and “Occident,” might seem rather older. Orient and Occident derive from the Latin for rising and falling, *orior* and *occido*, alluding to the sun’s apparent passage across the sky. Some educated medieval Europeans possessed a sense of “East” or “Orient” as opposed to “West” or “Occident,” but they were not preoccupied by the overarching binary inherent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalism. Generalities about the East or Indies were attempted by numerous encyclopedists, cartographers, and cosmologists who were working out of classical and early medieval traditions but were challenged by travelers who ventured east from the mid-thirteenth century. Thus one can identify only a limited medieval “Orientalism” in Said’s second sense, and furthermore this would have to be modified by uncertainty about the existence of an opposing “West.”

“*Oriens*” appeared regularly on medieval *mappaemundi*, notably the “T-O” maps that survive in over a thousand exemplars, mostly as manuscript illuminations, from the seventh to late fifteenth centuries.²⁰ However, in this cartographic context *Oriens* refers not to a geographic area but to one of four cardinal points or the winds of the earth along with *Occidens*, *Septentrio*, and *Meridies*.²¹ “Asia” is used to mark the largest of the world’s three continents, filling the top half of the globe, with “Europa” and “Africa” filling the lower quarters. This tradition dates back to antiquity. Akbari shows that medieval authors’ attempts to match up the four cardinal winds with the three continents were often awkward; she also argues that while the concept of a “whole, homogenous East” can be identified in medieval encyclopedic texts, it lacked a mirroring West as representative of “us.” The East may be where “they” are; “It does not follow, however, that the West is where ‘we’ are.”²² Instead, Europeans were usually conceived as people of the cold North.²³ More recently she has proposed that an East-West binary becomes increasingly visible by the fourteenth century, in some lines from Gower’s *Confessio amantis*, for

example, but the evidence for this contention seems scanty.²⁴ The Orient-Occident binary was known but not yet common in late medieval geographical thinking. The East was also considered in climatic terms, particularly by medieval scholars who incorporated the four directions into a quadripartite cosmology encompassing the four seasons and four humors. Most agreed that the East was “hotter” than the West, though there was disagreement over whether it was also wet or dry; William of Conches, for example, plumped for a hot, damp East, while Bartholomaeus Anglicus argued for hot and dry.²⁵

“India” was a common designation for large swathes of the Asian continent, particularly south and east, and was generally divided into three parts. “Nearer” or “Lesser” India often referred to the northern Indian subcontinent while “Further” or “Greater” India was the southern, though in Marco Polo the two are reversed. “Middle” or “Intermediate” India was Ethiopia—“half way to India.”²⁶ “Mandeville” focuses on climate rather than geography: India Major is very hot, India Minor is more temperate, and the third part, “to the north,” suffers extreme cold.²⁷ Alternatively, in some texts Further or Greater India extended indefinitely eastward from Malabar (the southwest Indian coast), as in Jordan’s *Mirabilia descripta*, or from the Ganges, as in Poggio’s report of Niccolò dei Conti’s journey, encompassing east and southeast Asia.²⁸ Medieval “India,” however conceived, constituted a vaster range of territory than implied by its modern reference to the Indian subcontinent and potentially encompassed south, east, and southeast Asia as well as east Africa.

By the time that actual travelers began to produce accounts of Asia, earlier authors’ claims about the Indies or Orient had achieved authoritative status. For example, Honorius Augustodunensis, in his widely read *Imago mundi* (c. 1110, surviving in at least 160 manuscripts), had spoken of the great cities of the Indies, vast populations, great quantities of gold and silver, monstrous and remarkable creatures, ferocious nations of Gog and Magog who eat human and raw animal flesh, tribes of mountain pygmies who give birth at three and are old at eight, and people who kill their elderly parents, cut them up, and serve the flesh at banquets.²⁹ The tradition of the “Wonders” or “Marvels” of the East, already old by Honorius’s day, populated eastern realms with diverse monsters, marvelous beasts, and hybrid creatures.³⁰ There dwelt “Headless men with eyes and mouths in their breasts [who] are eight feet tall and eight feet wide”; “The donestre [who] live on an island on their own in the Red Sea. They are partly human. They can speak various tongues and can entice men whom they eat up, save for the head over which they mourn”; “women with boar’s tusks, hair down to ankles, tails, bodies as white as marble, camel feet, and boar-like teeth”; and “a kindly

long-lived people who send visitors home with wives.”³¹ Some *mappaemundi* such as the Hereford World Map (c. 1300) depicted monstrous creatures in the extreme East (in this case, sciapods, pygmies, dogheads, and people who live off the scent of apples), but on this and other celebrated exemplars such as the Ebstorf (c. 1230–50) and “Psalter” (c. 1250) maps the monsters are usually placed on the African margins of the world. Given the conflation of “Ethiopia” and “Middle India,” perhaps such African monsters were understood as “Indian.” On these maps the extreme East was pictured as the location of the Terrestrial Paradise and the source of the four ancient rivers that gave the Orient its extraordinary fertility. The “Marvels of the Indies” endured in many texts until at least the fifteenth century, notably with Pierre d’Ailly’s influential *Imago mundi* of 1410–14, which had a great impact on Christopher Columbus, among others, and we shall see its associated imagery recurring in late medieval travel writing.³² The diverse marvels could be the object of European horror, pleasure, or admiration; for an example of the last, in many medieval texts Indians, especially “Brahmans” (Bragmanni), were viewed as models of simplicity and virtue.³³

An unusually detailed comparison of “West” and “East,” which does create a binary division in the way modern Orientalism does, appears in Gerald of Wales’s argument in *Topographia Hiberniae* (c. 1185) that “The advantages of the West are to be preferred to those of the East [*Quod occidentalia commoda sunt orientalibus preferenda*].”

What riches has the East then to offer in comparison with these [*Quas igitur hiis comparabiles orientales regio diuitias habet*]? It has, of course, many-colored silken cloth produced by the silk-worm; it has precious metals of certain types, sparkling gems and aromatic spices. But what are these in comparison with the loss of life and health? They are obtained only by enduring constantly the enmity of an enemy that one cannot get away from—the air that is within, and that surrounds one.³⁴

All the elements of the East, he explains are pestiferous; they

threaten his wretched life, deprive him of health, and finally kill him. If you put your naked foot upon the ground, death is upon you; if you sit upon marble without taking care, death is upon you; if you drink unmixed water, or merely smell dirty water with your nostrils, death is upon you; if you uncover your head to feel the breeze the better, it may affect you by either its heat or its coldness—but in any case, death is upon you. The heavens terrify you with their thunder and threaten you with their lightnings. The sun with its burning rays makes you uncomfortable. And if you take more food than is right, death is at the gate; if you take your wine unmixed with water, death is at the gate; if you do not hold your hand back from food long before you are satisfied, death is at the gate.

Furthermore, Gerald continues, poison is all around, dealt out by stepmothers to stepsons, wives to husbands, and cooks to masters, and if poisoned food and drink do not get you, the toxic “clothes, chairs

and seats of all kinds” will. In contrast, the pleasant mildness of the western climate is incomparable: “Let the East, then, have its riches—tainted and poisoned as they are.”³⁵ Gerald’s references to gems, silks, and spices indicate a concept of the East extending to China.

In Gerald’s account, and those of other high medieval writers such as Honorius, “the East” is a place one can generalize about no matter how vast its area and variety of peoples. Yet when travelers from the Latin West (or “North”) stepped east from the mid-thirteenth century, representations of the Orient changed. Although several late medieval travel writers weave strands of the European “Indies” tradition into their narratives, their works represent a new phase in European perspectives. Asia becomes varied, particular, familiar, or knowable. In this sense, their narratives from the period c. 1245–1510 could be described as *Between Orientalisms*.

Even in Gerald’s description, where climate is the key marker of regional identity, the cultural homogenization that Said finds definitive of modern Orientalism is lacking. “Orientals,” says Said on modern writing, were portrayed as “almost everywhere nearly the same.” For example, British imperialist discourse painted Indians as “gullible, ‘devoid of energy and initiative,’ much given to ‘fulsome flattery,’ intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals.” They are dishonest, devious, depraved, childlike, and above all irrational.³⁶ Caricatures of oriental despotism, passivity, and sensuality also abound.³⁷ Disregard for cultural differences across Asia is thus exacerbated by negative stereotyping. Now, we must again acknowledge that Said’s account offers a very narrow and one-dimensional view of modern views on Asia and is remarkably reductive particularly in relation to the works of Orientalist scholars. Nonetheless, if we limit our acceptance of his stereotype to some novelists, artists, and travel writers, we may observe that this tendency in modern western perceptions of oriental cultures was little shared by the travelers of our present study. Medieval travelers and pseudo-travelers rarely lumped diverse oriental cultures together or resorted to overarching caricatures. As we shall see, most genuine medieval travelers made some attempt to provide descriptions of the places they passed through and the customs of their inhabitants. When vagueness, generalization, or literary tradition crept in, it was generally because the traveler had shifted to description of a location he had not visited himself and/or was working with an amanuensis not always much concerned with accuracy. Poggio Bracciolini’s version of Niccolò dei Conti’s account of “India beyond the Ganges” falls into this category, as Niccolò seems not to have ventured into China and in any case did not pen his own narrative.³⁸

Concepts of “Orient,” the “East,” “Asia,” or “India,” then,

circulated in a range of European discourses, and each potentially posits an East against which the West might be set, but their generalizations deal mainly in matters of geography, climate, and marvels. The inattention to cultural differences that offends Said in modern Orientalist discourse is much less apparent. Thus, in the second part of Said's definition, later medieval travel narratives represent perspectives "before" Orientalism.

Orientalism potentially emphasizes attractive aspects of Asian Otherness, but in Said's version the juxtaposition of western superiority with eastern inferiority is paramount, and it is this that justifies imperial and colonial projects. Said suggests "the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority."³⁹ Here we have the key to the third strand of Said's definition ("The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony"),⁴⁰ which has helped give birth to postcolonial studies but has also attracted outrage from established parties wishing to defend western scholarship. To take one of the more recent critiques as an example, Robert Irwin's 2006 *For Lust of Knowing* (titled *Dangerous Knowledge* in its U.S. edition) offers an impassioned riposte to *Orientalism*, a book he blames for the decline of Oriental studies.⁴¹ Irwin's concern is not so much with Orientalism as a theme of literature and the visual arts but with the reputation of generations of scholars whom he believes Said defamed in his "work of malignant charlatanry."⁴² Said's effort to apply Foucauldian theories about the interrelated nature of knowledge and power particularly offends Irwin, yet he does acknowledge a connection between European imperialism and Orientalism from around the early eighteenth century. For example, discussing Peter the Great's expansion of the Russian Empire into largely Muslim Central Asia and the Caucasus, he notes that study of oriental languages and the Qur'an received royal patronage as "it was obviously desirable to understand Islam better in order to govern those Muslims more effectively."⁴³ Furthermore, in the 1770s, while a number of French Orientalists were engaged in academic work on the Middle East, "French politicians, merchants and soldiers had developed a more predatory interest in that region" and "[t]here were plenty of French theorists ready to argue that Ottoman Turkey, a typical Oriental despotism, was in full decay, because ... despotism conducted inevitably to slavery, polygamy and softness."⁴⁴ The founding and expansion of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) was explicitly linked to British foreign expansion, while the "belated beginnings" of American Orientalism paralleled the United States' growing hunger for oil and "ambitions to supplant Britain as the leading power in the Middle

East.”⁴⁵ Irwin reluctantly acknowledges “it must be conceded that Said has perhaps as much as half a point.”⁴⁶

Said is unfortunately prone to dramatic overstatements in *Orientalism*, which may explain why specialists have found his influence so galling. Take, for example, the following: “Islam excepted, the Orient for Europe was until the nineteenth century a domain with a continuous history of unchallenged Western dominance. This is patently true of the British experience in India, the Portuguese experience in the East Indies, China, and Japan, and the French and Italian experiences in various regions of the Orient.”⁴⁷ One would not be advised to take this as a guide to the history of European influence in Asia. Yet a broader point, which might have been more seriously pursued, is that financial support for the development of European intellectual study of Middle Eastern and Asian languages and cultures corresponded with the growth in European commercial and political interests in the regions. France’s *École Spéciale des Langues Orientales* was founded in 1795 between phases of French economic colonialism in Asia and in prelude to the Napoleonic and later eras of direct French rule in Indochina, and the school’s founding document stated that its mission was to teach living Oriental languages “of recognized utility for politics and commerce.”⁴⁸ The distinguished British Sinologist Herbert A. Giles (1845–1935) complained at the end of his career that while a professor he had had “only one student at Cambridge who really wished to learn the language for its own sake”: the rest were aspiring diplomats and missionaries.⁴⁹ Britain’s celebrated School of Oriental Studies (“African” was added in 1938) was founded in 1916 at the height of direct British imperial rule across the globe. Its Royal Charter of Incorporation noted that the founding of the school “would be for the public advantage.”⁵⁰ Irwin himself states that “Orientalists had sold to the government the idea of the School as an imperial training centre,” although “most of those appointed seem to have been academics who despised the idea of vocational training.”⁵¹ Regardless of the high ideals of scholars, by the 1940s the British government clearly found the school invaluable for indirectly aiding its control of the Middle East: “Towards the end of the [Second World] war, Britain directly or indirectly controlled most of the Middle East from Iran to Morocco. One consequence of this was that in London ... (SOAS) was crowded with servicemen, diplomats and administrators taking language and culture courses before setting out for the Far East, India and Sudan.”⁵² In the 1940s, dismayed by Britain’s decline, a government committee recommended pumping resources into the school to help reassert its far eastern influence.⁵³ Irwin blames Said for destroying his discipline, but the decline of European eastern imperialism in the later twentieth

century is a more likely cause. Pure as the motives of the academic Orientalists may have been, those of their funding bodies and many of their students may have often been more pragmatic.⁵⁴ *Orientalism*, for all its faults and errors, poses piercing questions about western production of scholarship and cultural representations of non-western cultures that one should not ignore in any study of colonialist or imperialist cultural encounters.

Yet—and here we return to the central point of this book —“colonialism” or “imperialism” does not describe relations between Latin Christians and Asian peoples before the turn of the sixteenth century. Prior to that, to be sure, mercantile, diplomatic, and missionary activities placed a European toehold in Asian locations that would pave the way for later large-scale expansion. It seems likely, furthermore, that the fifteenth-century Portuguese had commercial ambitions in the Indies and lacked only technological advancement and maritime knowledge to bring them to fruition. The exploits of Vasco da Gama, deployed by the Portuguese crown in 1497–98 to find routes and establish a trading base in western India to help gain access to the eastern spice trade and overturn Venetian monopolies, show how quickly western European encounters in the distant east turned ugly with the growth in commercial ambitions. Soon after he landed on the Indian coast near Calicut, the trajectory of western colonial aggression with which we are now familiar became apparent. By the time that Afonso de Albuquerque was planting a definitively Portuguese presence on the Malabar Coast and around the Indian Ocean in the early sixteenth century, European interests in the East had taken a radically belligerent turn.⁵⁵ In 1503 Portugal set up a trading outpost in Cochin (Kochi, in Kerala). Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Portugal and the Netherlands established an extensive network of trading stations in south and southeast Asia, and the French and British became active in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries while the Russian Empire expanded steadily in the north. The greatest formal European possessions in Asia were the Dutch East Indies (1800–1942), British India (1858–1947), and French Indochina (1887–1954), but the European nations at different times held a large number of other desirable territories, both large (for example, Burma, Ceylon/ Sri Lanka) and small (Macau, Malacca, Hong Kong). D. K. Fieldhouse, in an oft-quoted statistic, calculates that by the 1930s 84.6 percent of the world’s land surface was covered by European colonies or ex-colonies, and “parts of Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Tibet, China, Siam and Japan were the only states which had never been under formal European government.”⁵⁶ Given that every one of these exceptions is an Asian country, and compared with the total or near total European domination of the

Americas, Australasia, Africa, and the Pacific, Asia might appear to have escaped relatively lightly. Yet the phrase “formal European government” (or colonialism proper) veils a good deal of colonialist or imperialist activity, especially commercial. Before Asian locations became formal crown colonies they had often long been in the hands of trading companies, notably the various East India companies (Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British). China, apart from Russian Manchuria and some small but significant areas such as Hong Kong and Macau, was not formally in European hands, but it was subject to intense economic pressure, particularly from the British from the time of the First Opium War (1839–42). American military and economic interests in Asia saw the growth of its “informal empire” there from the turn of the twentieth century. From the late eighteenth century through to the mid-twentieth, south, east, and southeast Asia were subject to European colonizing forces.⁵⁷ Varied as these forces undoubtedly were, no one could seriously argue that these factors prevailed before the early sixteenth century; indeed, they did not achieve their full potency before the eighteenth century.

Western Europeans did not suddenly develop a new, Orientalist sensibility in the early sixteenth century. A problem for early modern and modern historians is to identify at what point it becomes possible to speak of Orientalism as an explanatory framework for European writings about India and the far East. Joan-Pau Rubiés, for example, denies that the concept is adequate for describing Portuguese writing on India up to the end of the sixteenth century.⁵⁸ Robert Markley also demonstrates that laudatory perspectives on China remained powerful right through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁹ Both China and Japan, partly as a result of Jesuit influence that sought to emphasize those nations’ high levels of civilization and rationality, remained the subject of European admiration at least until the early eighteenth century.⁶⁰ It appears that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are the best available candidates for the high-water mark of Orientalism, in all senses of the word. Stereotyping, homogenizing, and demonizing became regular, but never inevitable, features of western discourse on far eastern regions only from the early eighteenth century. They were never more than part of the story, yet assertions of European superiority such as Samuel Purchas’s in 1613 (quoted below, pp. 63–64) may indicate the beginning of a sea change. His claims for European greatness are illustrative of the profound shift in consciousness wrought by European exploration and conquest of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. That supreme *secular* self-confidence or ethnocentrism has few distant echoes in the writings of our medieval travelers (discussed further in Chapter 3), though confidence in *religious* rightness was second nature to medieval

Latin Christians.

Orientalism's lasting value is not in providing the answers but in offering a starting point for scholarship that can provide textured accounts of the complicated and many-layered views "westerners" of different eras have formed of Asian cultures. They have been wondering, curious, admiring, inquiring, envious, avaricious, possessive, superior, censorious, denigrating, stereotyping, and demonizing but not generally all at the same time. Medieval travelers knew nothing of the world that would succeed them. They could never have envisaged the extraordinary European takeover of later centuries. To them, Mongolia, China, the Indian subcontinent, Burma, the kingdom of Champa (southern and central Vietnam), and the multitudinous islands scattered across the ocean at the farthest reaches of their known earth represented new and fascinating worlds meriting diverse responses. The peoples of these places were variously regarded with fear, disdain, wonder, and awe and were the focus of wariness, curiosity, and pleasure. Conspicuously absent from medieval western responses to Asia was the urge so familiar in more recent times: the desire to possess.

Chapter 2

Travelers, Tales, Audiences

Travelers' tales are often the preserve of the young, vigorous, and egocentric, yet it fell to an aging, overweight Franciscan friar to be among the first to travel into the heartland of a far Asian empire and return to tell his story. John of Plano Carpini (Giovanni di Pian di Carpine, c. 1180–1252), born in Pian di Carpine, now Magione near Perugia, was an early stalwart of the Franciscan order and near contemporary of St. Francis.¹ He had spent the 1220s and 1230s traveling Saxony and Spain to help establish the new order in those places, gaining a reputation for trustworthiness and sound judgment, kindness, and piety. His fellow Franciscan Giordano da Giano left a vivid image of him as, in de Rachewiltz's paraphrase, "a kind, genial and heavily built man, so heavy in fact that he used to ride a donkey instead of the prescribed horse, thereby attracting notice and sympathy wherever he went."² By 1245 he had surely earned some quiet and comfortable twilight years but instead was called by the new pope, Innocent IV, to head one of four diplomatic missions into Mongol territory. He was not the first—there had been some earlier Hungarian expeditions into Mongol-held territories—but he is distinguished for the distance traveled and for his account of the journey. Carpini, accompanied first by Friar Stephen of Bohemia, who fell ill en route and was replaced by Benedict the Pole, departed from Lyon on 16 April 1245 and took the route via Bohemia, Poland, and southern Russia. He reached the camp of Güyük Khân under Mongol escort just west of the capital Karakorum on 22 July 1246.

It was a heroic journey of several thousand kilometers into dangerous territory, strewn in places with "skulls and bones of dead men lying on the ground like dung."³ They kept up a cracking pace with five or seven changes of horses every day in the later phases, traveling from dawn to nightfall with no stopping for meals and indeed often no chance to eat in the evenings as they made camp so late. Benedict the Pole tells how they bandaged their limbs to "bear the strain of continual riding."⁴ Ruy Gonzáles de Clavijo, Castilian ambassador to Temür in the early fifteenth century, concurred that "it

is scarcely to be believed, had we not ourselves seen it and thus we can vouch for the truth, what a distance these [Mongol] riders can encompass in a day. ... By the roadside many were the dead horses we saw during our journey, which had been thus ridden to death and the carcass abandoned.”⁵ Carpini’s return journey took place through the winter of 1246–47, finally arriving at Lyon in November 1247. As he tells it, the friars slept on the freezing open ground, often waking to find themselves covered in snow. On reaching Europe, Carpini and his companions were greeted “as if we were risen from the dead.”⁶ Presumably Carpini no longer sported the corpulent figure for which he had previously been celebrated.

At the same time Lawrence of Portugal, also Franciscan, was to have approached the Mongols via the Levant but nothing is known of his journey; he may have died on the way or perhaps did not go at all.⁷ Two further missions via the eastern Mediterranean were headed by Dominicans, that of Ascelin and his companion, Simon of St. Quentin, who reached the camp of Baiju in the Armenian highlands in May 1247, and that of Andrew of Longjumeau, who traveled to a Mongolian encampment near Tabriz in Persia in 1245–47 and to the camp of the regent Oghul-Qaimish, widow of Güyük Khân, southwest of Lake Baikal at the request of King Louis IX in 1249–51.⁸ All these journeys required considerable courage, given the Mongolians’ reputation as ferocious warriors. As Peter Jackson and David Morgan comment drily, “The Mongol imperial government held a fairly uncomplicated view of international relations.” They believed Tenggeri (the “Eternal Heaven”) had granted the entire world to the Mongols, and it was the duty of all other rulers and peoples to submit to them or pay a terrible price.⁹

Carpini’s, Ascelin’s, and Andrew of Longjumeau’s missions resulted in written accounts of Mongol peoples and represent some of the earliest European ethnographic writing on Asia.¹⁰ However, descriptions of Mongols had already begun to circulate from the 1220s, when Europe was under threat of total conquest. Some of these were preserved in Matthew Paris’s *Chronica majora*.¹¹ The papal emissaries offered less panicky descriptions that sought not to demonize but to warn and inform. Each of their accounts, however, has a complex textual and authorial history. Benedict the Pole, Carpini’s companion, left a short dictated account of their journey.¹² Ascelin’s journey is represented by the record of his companion, Simon of St. Quentin, but this does not survive in any independent copy and is known only from extracts Vincent of Beauvais copied into his *Speculum historiale* (c. 1253) along with excerpts from Carpini.¹³ Likewise, Andrew of Longjumeau’s work has not survived independently, though copies of his translations of letters from eastern

Christians and Mongols are in Papal registers. Parts of his record of the first journey and a little on the second are preserved in Matthew Paris's *Chronica majora*, while Joinville's *Histoire de Saint Louis* includes information from the latter.¹⁴ However, from the point of view of medieval as well as modern readers, Carpini's book, titled *Ystoria [Historia] Mongalorum* in key manuscripts, is the most important. It was produced upon the friar's return to Lyon in 1247 and survives in two main versions. The shorter is extant in twelve copies and contains the chief ethnographic and military chapters. The longer, which adds a lengthy final chapter narrating the friars' itinerary, is in three manuscripts and is the version used here.¹⁵

Among variant versions of Carpini and Benedict's itinerary, one, generally known as *The Tartar Relation*, was discovered in 1957. This became famous because of the manuscript's inclusion of the so-called Vinland Map, reputed to be a fifteenth-century redrawing of a thirteenth-century original and depicting a large island labeled "Vinland" to the west of Greenland.¹⁶ This first excited the attention of book dealers and historians who believed it the earliest European cartographic depiction of North America, but it is now widely accepted as a twentieth-century forgery. However, the remainder of the manuscript, consisting of *The Tartar Relation* and a copy of Vincent's *Speculum historiale*, is considered authentic.¹⁷ Coming from the pen of one C. de Bridia, *The Tartar Relation* was probably written down by someone who heard Benedict and/or Carpini speaking of their travels at some point on their homeward route.¹⁸ The text is close to Carpini's but with plausible additions and variations: there is nothing to ring alarm bells over anachronism. Carpini himself says that versions were made on their journey home.

Many have suggested that one of Innocent IV's motives in sending envoys to the Mongols was to investigate the possibilities of a joint Mongol-Christian campaign against the Saracens in the Holy Land, though Menestò, Carpini's recent editor, finds no direct evidence for this. Rather, the missions were "diplomatic, but also exploratory."¹⁹ With the Mongol threat to Latin Europe still very real and their bloody conquests ongoing, Innocent's chief aim was to compile a dossier of useful information on their territories, way of life, and above all weapons and techniques of war to better prepare themselves for the defense.²⁰ From the *Historia Mongalorum* itself one may gather that Carpini's motivations in writing were to produce a work recognized as the true and full version of the journey and provide detailed practical information to aid in future dealings with Mongols. He lists European merchants and dignitaries whom the friars met while in Mongolian-controlled territory "to avoid any doubt arising in the minds of anyone as to our having been to the Tartars."²¹ According to the chronicler

Salimbene de Adam, who met with Carpini on two occasions after the latter's return to Lyon, he saw him "carrying with him the book which he had written on the Tartars. And the friars read it in his presence; and he commented on and clarified to them those things which appeared obscure or difficult to believe."²² In her comparison of the two main versions of Carpini's text, Maria Cristiana Lungarotti shows how the second draft consistently expands upon the first for the purposes of clarification and to reemphasize its truthfulness.²³ Around one-fifth of the second version is devoted to geographic and ethnographic material, another fifth to Mongol history and the rise of their empire, a quarter to military tactics and technologies, and the final third or so to the itinerary and experiences of the friars. The work is readable but was not designed for entertainment.

King Louis IX called upon another Franciscan, William of Rubruck from Flanders, to travel to the Mongols in 1253. Rubruck and his companions reached the camp of Möngke Khân at Karakorum on 27 December 1253.²⁴ Like Carpini, Rubruck was a heavy man,²⁵ and he, too, suffered physical hardship on his journey: "There is no counting the times we were famished, thirsty, frozen and exhausted."²⁶ His insistence on the Franciscan habit of going barefoot despite December snow near Karakorum suggests, however, that some of this suffering was self-inflicted.²⁷ After almost six months at the Khân's court Rubruck gained leave to depart, but his companion, Bartholomew of Cremona, could not face the journey home and elected to live out his days among the Mongols on the harsh steppes of the Khân's empire.

The reasons for Rubruck's mission are harder to determine than those of his predecessors. Rubruck's own motivations seem to have been religious—to convert Mongols to Christianity and to console Christians under Mongol occupation—but Louis's intentions, as a man persistently obsessed with crusading, were probably more political. In any case, Rubruck's book bears similarities to Carpini's as a record of useful information though is markedly different in form. Where Carpini's book is part ethnography, part history, part military intelligence report, and part itinerary, Rubruck's is mostly itinerary. Less than 10 percent of his book ([chapters 2–8](#)) is given over to direct ethnography; the remainder tells of his journey and personal experiences, with further ethnographic descriptions scattered throughout. Rubruck's account of the Mongols is more negative than his predecessor's but still relatively moderate; it could not be called an attempt at demonization. Rubruck's work has appealed very much to some modern readers of "travel writing" (discussed in Chapter 3) but was little known in the Middle Ages, with only five manuscripts extant and one of those is merely a fourteenth-century copy of the oldest one surviving. These are all in Latin and of English origin and show his

audience was primarily educated and monastic, including the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds, St. Mary's Abbey in York, and Simon Bozon, Prior of Norwich Cathedral Priory (1344–52).²⁸

Furthermore, Roger Bacon interviewed Rubruck in Paris and used his geographical information in the *Opus majus*. Indeed, Bacon provides justifications for the inclusion of geographical knowledge in his work. It has value for missionary efforts and for eschatological forewarning:

This knowledge of the places of the world is very necessary to the state of the believers, and for the conversion of unbelievers and for opposing unbelievers and Antichrist and others. ... For the most vigorous men sometimes through their ignorance of the places in the world have destroyed themselves and the business interests of Christians, because they have passed through places too hot in the hot seasons and too cold in the cold seasons. They have also met with countless dangers because they did not know when they encountered the regions of believers, or of schismatics, Saracens, Tartars, Tyrants, men of peace, barbarians, or of men with reasonable minds. He who is ignorant of the places in the world lacks a knowledge not only of his destination, but of the course to pursue.²⁹

On the need to foresee what the end of the Second Age of the world might entail, “the Church should have excellent knowledge of the situation and condition of the ten tribes of the Jews, who will come forth in the days to come.” Alexander the Great found these nations dwelling in Hyrcania on the Caspian Sea and confined them more strictly behind high mountains:

Since, then, these nations shut up in certain localities of the world will come forth to desolate regions and meet Antichrist, Christians and especially the Roman Church should study carefully the location of places, that it may be able to learn the ferocity of nations of this kind and through them to learn the time and origin of Antichrist; for these races must obey him. ... Friar William, moreover, whom the lord king of France sent to the Tartars in the year of our Lord 1253, when he was beyond sea, wrote to the king aforesaid that he crossed with Tartars through the middle of the gates that Alexander constructed.³⁰

It seems relevant that the copy of Rubruck's book held by the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds also contains a copy of the “Liber Methodius,” the influential seventh-century Syrian *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius.³¹

Missionaries and diplomats would continue to be among the chief witnesses in text of Asian civilizations to around 1500, but chronologically the next major contribution came from the son of a Venetian merchant. Marco Polo and his book, *Le Divisament dou monde* (Description of the World) (c. 1298), are exemplary of the unstable nature of medieval authors and books. There is no single manuscript representing the original text or even a “definitive version,” given the

great diversity found among the approximately 150 extant copies, not two of which are exactly alike.³² Moreover, there is no book we can truly say is by an “author” called Marco Polo, given that the original version of our surviving texts was produced in collaboration with a professional romance writer, and the diversity among manuscripts demonstrates that individual scribes and translators often made free with the text, inserting editorial comment and even purportedly informative content without any apparent sense of transgression. It went by various names in medieval manuscripts: *Divisament dou monde* (in French, *Devisement du monde*) but also *Le Livre des merveilles du monde*, *Li Livres du Graunt Caam*, *De mirabilibus mundi*, and *De condicionibus et consuetudinibus orientalium regionum*. *The Travels*, however, is a postmedieval title.³³ The book is a challenging prospect for editors, to put it mildly, and has prompted a vast array of scholarly studies. Even to attempt to supply a reasonably extensive bibliography would require a book in itself.³⁴ Yet enormous riches await anyone who turns to the *Divisament* for its depiction of the Asian continent through medieval European eyes.

Marco (1254–c. 1325) was the son of Niccolò Polo, who with his brothers Marco and Maffeo owned a prominent Venetian family business. The Polos had a trading base at Soldaia (Sudak) on the Crimean Peninsula, and it was from here in c. 1260 that Niccolò and Maffeo set out to trade jewels at Sarai (near present-day Volgograd), seat of Berke Khân, who was then ruler of the Golden Horde. The Polo brothers found themselves forced farther northeast when violent Byzantine reprisals against Venetians followed the Byzantine recapture of Constantinople and fighting broke out between Mongol rulers of Persia and the Golden Horde. After three years in Bukhara (Buxoro) they accepted an invitation from an embassy from Persia to travel to the court of the Great Khân, Khubilai (r. 1260–94), and journeyed far to the north and east to an uncertain location in the Mongolian heartland. Khubilai saw an opportunity to make contact with the West and sent the brothers back to Italy with a letter to the pope requesting one hundred Christians to return east to teach Mongols about Christianity. Delayed by the papal vacancy of 1269–71, the brothers finally returned to Khubilai’s court with the blessing of the new pope, Gregory X, in 1271, accompanied not by one hundred missionaries but by Niccolò’s seventeen-year-old son, Marco. They reached Khubilai at Shangdu, his summer capital in Cathay (northern China), in 1274. They departed probably in 1291, escorting a Mongol princess to Persia, and arrived back in Venice around 1295.

Marco spent about seventeen years in China and around twenty-four years abroad in total. He left Venice an adolescent and returned a middle-aged man. Details of his life in China remain mysterious.

Although he is regularly described as a “merchant” in modern scholarship, it is unclear whether he and the elder Polos engaged in profitable trade so far from home. A number of Venetian and Genoese merchants went to China and India in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries so one must presume some commerce between Italians and Chinese, but such ventures are not described in the *Divisament*.³⁵ The book claims rather that Khubilai took an instant liking to Marco and engaged him on numerous diplomatic missions throughout his eastern realms. It more dubiously states that Khubilai made him governor of the great city of Yangzhou for three years, that the three Polos played a decisive part in the subjection of Xiangyang, one of the last cities of the Southern Song dynasty to fall to Khubilai’s forces, and that Marco’s diplomatic ventures on behalf of Khubilai provided the initial impetus for his attempts to describe what he had seen.³⁶ Many of the *Divisament*’s modern readers have scorned these details, citing a lack of contemporary Chinese records substantiating them. The claim of governorship is unlikely to be true, and from chronology alone the military claim is certainly invented as the siege of Xiangyang ended in 1273, two years before the Polos’ arrival.³⁷ A few have gone further and contended that his whole book is a fiction, notably Frances Wood in *Did Marco Polo Go to China?*³⁸ However, that argument is now discredited. Igor de Rachewiltz shows that numerous details were previously unrecorded in European texts and must have been the result of observation.³⁹ He argues that Marco probably had relatively little to do with Chinese people and did not speak Chinese; rather, he moved among the Mongol, Persian, and Turkic peoples in residence and communicated in the Persian *lingua franca* of foreign denizens, which helps explain many alleged “omissions,” such as tea drinking and foot-binding. The lack of any description of the Great Wall is accounted for by the fact that the wall as we know it was not built before the sixteenth century. De Rachewiltz further shows that the embassy in which the Polos accompanied Princess Kökechin to Persia to marry the il-khân Arghun (a marriage that did not occur owing to Arghun’s death in the interim) could only have been described as a result of direct experience, as it was not recorded in any Chinese or other sources available to a European by 1298. The inclusion of descriptions of a range of locations suggests Marco traveled widely while in China, particularly in the north and down the eastern coast to “Zaiton” (Quanzhou), but also that he related tales he had heard of other regions from other travelers or his Mongol or Chinese hosts. His account of Cipangu (Japan), for example, is a result of hearsay rather than observation, and it has been suggested that his frequently mundane descriptions of south and east China came about from conversation rather than witness.⁴⁰ The book’s account of the

three Polos' roundabout and strangely lengthy journey to "Cambaluc" (Khanbalikh or Khanbaliq) has also been doubted. John Larner acerbically remarks, "It is like travelling from Toronto to New Orleans by way of the Rocky Mountains." The efforts of modern readers to identify the route taken by the Polos and provide accompanying maps are, Larner argues, a result of reading the book as an account of "travels" rather than what it states itself to be: a "Description of the World."⁴¹

The slippery nature of the work becomes clearer still when we consider its composition. According to the *Divisament*, following his return to Venice Marco was caught up in a sea battle between Venetian and Genoese forces and became a prisoner of war in 1298.⁴² While interned he met Rusticello da Pisa, an author of Arthurian romances, and during their long hours of incarceration they together concocted the book in a hybrid Franco-Italian.⁴³ The book caught on and was swiftly translated into French, Tuscan, and Venetian. The Dominican Friar Pipino produced a Latin version with a stronger Christian tone between 1314 and 1324, and this version represents 43 percent of surviving copies.⁴⁴ German, Bohemian, Catalan, Aragonese, Portuguese, Gaelic, and other Latin versions followed. It was, in Larner's words, "an unparalleled record in the Middle Ages for translations effected during the life of the author."⁴⁵ Only four surviving copies are extensively illuminated though a number of others are illustrated on a more modest scale and no doubt other illuminated copies have been lost.⁴⁶ It is noticeable that the early fifteenth-century artists who worked on the grandest copies of the book (in Paris, Bib. Nat. fr. 2810 and Oxford, Bodley 264) regularly enhanced or exaggerated the oriental "Otherness" of places and peoples described, to the point of adding monstrous races where none is described in the text or portraying Mongol warriors as small, dark-skinned, "functional Saracens."⁴⁷ Such emphasis on difference is at odds with much of the book's textual content. On the other hand they portray a light-skinned Khubilai Khân and Chinese courts, civilized habits, and cities as comparable to European counterparts. Manuscripts of Pipino's Latin translation are parchment or high-quality paper productions and were aimed at a well-educated Christian readership seeking knowledge of the world God had created. The French manuscripts tend to be high-quality, luxury items while many of the Venetian, Tuscan, and other copies are paper manuscripts perhaps owned by gentlemen or mercantile readers.⁴⁸



Figure 1. *The Travels of Marco Polo (The Million or Le Livre des Merveilles)*. Map with the route of the journey [modern interpretation]. Drawing. Photo credit: © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY.

While it has become conventional to stress that the *Divisament* was viewed as mostly an incredible fiction by medieval readers—the nickname “Il Milione” is thought by some to refer to the author’s alleged habit of concocting extravagant fables⁴⁹—Dutschke and Larner go to lengths to counter this libel. They show that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century chroniclers, theologians, geographers, cartographers, and other intellectuals looked to the *Divisament* for moral insight and valuable information on the earth’s distant reaches. Both cite the testimony of Paduan professor Pietro d’Abano, who stated he had spoken to Marco in seeking instruction on the habitability of the equatorial parts of the world.⁵⁰ Indeed, Larner claims skepticism about the book did not become widespread until the later seventeenth century.⁵¹

Another way to approach the question of reader reception is to focus on specific contexts. Suzanne M. Yeager shows that the *Divisament* had a different readership in England from its readership in many Continental contexts. Pipino’s Latin translation was by far the dominant version of the *Divisament* in England, with other Latin versions also in circulation there, and indeed the book did not receive English translation until 1579. The English readers were well educated and seem to have treated the book as a serious factual account with moral value; it often appears in manuscripts alongside scientific treatises, histories, and devotional works.⁵² Its Italian appeal was broader. Christine Gadrat’s research into fourteenth-century Italian

Dominican uses of the *Divisament* shows that it had not only moral and edifying appeal (as in Pipino's *Chronicon*, Pietro Calo da Chioggia's *Legendary*, and Nicoluccio of Ascoli's sermons) and educative value (as in Jacopo d'Acqui's *Chronica ymaginis mundi*) but also lighter functions. Filippino da Ferrara used about twenty anecdotes from the *Divisament* in his *Liber de introductione loquendi* (c. 1325–47), a guide to pleasant conversation aimed at friars dealing with a range of social contexts from dining with the laity to visiting ill friends. These included the anecdote (discussed in Chapter 6) concerning oriental peoples who offer their wives to travelers as part of their hospitality and another about the people who make a kind of pasta from the meal produced from sago trees. Filippino writes, the dish “is very good and master Marco tasted it several times. This can be told when good pasta is on the table.”⁵³

The *Divisament* appealed in various ways to its diverse readers. We shall see in the next chapter that modern readers are often baffled or repelled by the *Divisament*'s repetitive style and the apparent laziness of its linking phrases—“And why should I make you a long story?”—yet Larner suggests this “was designed to produce a lulling, undemanding, hypnotic rhythm which carried them forward effortlessly.”⁵⁴ While some readers sought epic elements, others involved in European-Asian trade may have been drawn to the book's lists of places, natural resources, and commodities such as salt, silk, and spices. Others looked for geographic and chorographic information to aid them in placing Asia within a Christian cosmology, especially once Friar Pipino's Latin translation gave the book greater authority for Christian intellectuals. The *Divisament*'s attention to certain kinds of Asian marvels appealed to medieval audiences' persistent, if fading, sense of wonder. Its accounts of abundant foods, splendid cities, and freedom from Christian monogamy and sexual restraint were among the elements that made the book a miscellany of earthly pleasures. Marco Polo's Orient, but particularly his Mongol-ruled China, was a place of sophistication and sensual delights. Indeed, such readings were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Benedetto, Dutschke, and Larner cite the testimony of humanist Domenico di Bandino, who gave the book ample space in his thirty-five-volume encyclopedia around the turn of the fifteenth century, taking it to be instructive in the way that the geographical statements of Pliny, Isidore of Seville, and Brunetto Latini were, while also describing it as “delightful” (*delectabilem*).⁵⁵ As the longest and most detailed of the travel narratives studied here, it exemplifies the argument that medieval readers sought variously information, edification, wonder, and pleasure in contemporary travelers' tales of the Orient.

In the wake of diplomatic envoys and merchants came a wave of missionaries. Ricold of Monte Croce's *Liber peregrinacionis*, also called his *Itinerarius*, was produced after his return to Italy from Baghdad in 1301 following thirteen years of voyaging in the Middle East.⁵⁶ Ricold (1242–1320) was a Dominican missionary from Florence who embarked on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1288 and continued through Turkey and Persia to Baghdad in 1289, remaining for twelve years. He learned Arabic and gained a relatively high level of knowledge about Islam—though viewing it as Christian heresy—and though his written work, notably the *Contra legem sarracenorum*, denigrated the Muslim faith, he was more generous in describing Muslim peoples. His *Liber peregrinacionis* reserves its most negative ethnological assessments for Turks, Kurds, and Mongols. In its original Latin the work was not very widely transmitted. Seven manuscripts survive, three of which are fragmentary. There are also six extant manuscripts of John le Long's 1351 French translation and three late medieval copies of Italian translations, two fragmentary.⁵⁷ For the present work, Ricold's text is valuable primarily for its account of Mongols. Persia was under Mongol control during his stay in Baghdad so some of his observances could be drawn from witness. On the other hand, his account includes historical and mythological material that may be taken from Persian associates, their Mongol leaders, or both.

A number of Franciscan missionaries journeyed to Khanbaliq and Zaiton in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Three wrote letters to the leaders and brothers of their orders, the originals of which do not survive but were copied into a Franciscan chronicle c. 1335–36: John of Monte Corvino (letters dated 1305 and 1306), Peregrine of Castello (letter dated 1318), and Andrew of Perugia (letter dated 1326).⁵⁸ Unfortunately they wrote relatively little about the countries and cultures of the East in these brief epistles, telling mainly of successes or failures in conversion of local populations. The same is true of the letter or letters of Jordan Catala of Sévérac, a Dominican writing from India around 1321.⁵⁹ Jordan traveled to the Indian subcontinent with a group of Franciscan missionaries in 1320, returning to Avignon by 1329. His Franciscan companions were killed in Thana near Bombay (Mumbai) in 1321, and it appears that in 1324 he handed their remains to Odoric of Pordenone, who took them to the Catholic archdiocese in Khanbaliq. The Spanish Franciscan Pascal of Vittoria also wrote briefly from Almaliq about his experiences among the Saracens in 1338.⁶⁰ A related letter from “Friar Menentillus” claims to relate views of a Franciscan missionary who had traveled to India with the Dominican Nicholas of Pistoia.⁶¹ Yule and Wyngaert deduced that this traveler, named “Friar John the Cordelier” (i.e., the Franciscan) by Pietro of Abano, must have been

John of Monte Corvino, writing from his time in India, c. 1292–93.⁶² However, given its unclear provenance and its difference in content and tone from Monte Corvino's two signed letters, this attribution is not certain. The letter reads less as a firsthand account of personal experience in the East than as a general description of eastern regions and peoples.

Although the missionary epistles survive only as copies and were subjected to revision by their earliest scribes, they seem to have circulated among Franciscan and curial circles in the early to mid-fourteenth century.⁶³ Jordan Catala of Sévérac's *Mirabilia descripta* was read in similar contexts but survives in only one manuscript.⁶⁴ More an account of natural wonders than an ethnography, its occasionally breathless tone is quite different from the author's mournful letters. "*Mirabile*" is his frequent refrain: "Everything indeed is a marvel in this India," he says of India the Greater, which to him is all of south and southeast Asia.⁶⁵ A work called "*Le livre de l'estat du grant caan*" (The Book of the Estate of the Great Caan [Khân]), composed in the late 1320s or early 1330s, had apparently wider impact. It celebrates achievements of Franciscan missionaries in Cathay, naming John of Monte Corvino, Andrew of Perugia, and Peter of Florence, and offers a highly favorable account of Cathay and the potential for the whole population's conversion to Roman Christianity. A Latin version ("*De statu, conditione ac regimine magni canis*"), copied in 1346, has only recently been discovered and edited; previously only six manuscript copies of John le Long's 1351 French translation were known.⁶⁶ Christine Gadrat, who discovered the Latin manuscript, shows the traditional ascription to the "Archbishop of Soltaniah" (Sultaniyeh in Persia) is based on a mistranscription of *Saltensis*, from which historians derived *Soltaniensis*. Rather, it was presented by the Archbishop of Salerno (*Salernitanum*) by the command of Pope John XXII, and the Latin text of the 1346 copy, possibly made in German lands, is probably translated from an Italian Franciscan original. The traditional attribution to the Dominican John de Cora, who took up the see of Sultaniyeh early in 1330, is therefore discounted. The work was probably not a traveler's account but instead composed in Europe from written sources. It shows influences from the *Divisament*, Odoric of Pordenone's *Relatio*, Jordan's *Mirabilia*, and the letters of Franciscan missionaries to China. Gadrat suggests that the work began to circulate rapidly, especially within circles connected to the curia at a time when the Avignonese papacy was renewing interest in the oriental missions.⁶⁷

A late contribution to this wave of missionary accounts comes in unusual form from John of Marignolli (c. 1290–after 1362), a Florentine Franciscan intellectual sent as part of a papal delegation of

more than thirty people into east and south Asia (1338–53) to investigate the state of oriental Christianity and consider prospects for future missions. He spent perhaps three or four years in Khanbaliq (c. 1342–47), then journeyed to Zaiton from where he embarked for India and Ceylon en route to Europe. While compiling a world history (c. 1356) Marignolli took the opportunity—prompted by speaking of Creation and Eden—to record scattered observations on the East.⁶⁸ Henry Yule, in a felicitous phrase, describes these as “like unexpected fossils in a mud-bank,” buried as they are in the Bohemian chronicle surviving in one full and one partial manuscript, unedited until 1768.⁶⁹ This is not a work, then, that had a significant audience or influence upon later texts; however, it is interesting as a distinctive, sometimes fanciful account of eastern places. Marignolli’s reminiscences lose their narrative thread and become rambling and anecdotal as he goes on. He mentions the Terrestrial Paradise, “Adam’s garden,” and the dress and food of Adam and Eve along with other Old Testament allusions. The biblical past and the exotic East are thus intertwined for Marignolli, in a way not uncommon for medieval authors but not usually found in the works of genuine travelers. On the other hand, he demonstrates scrupulous rationality in discussing monstrous peoples.

By far the most important work on the distant East to derive from missionary experience is Odoric of Pordenone’s *Relatio*.⁷⁰ Odoric (c. 1286–1331), also a Franciscan, had already spent around twenty years doing missionary work in Russia, Turkey, and Persia when with James of Ireland he took the seaward route to China via India and southeast Asia around 1318, collecting the remains of the martyred Franciscans in Thana in 1324 and reaching John of Monte Corvino’s archbishopric in Khanbaliq in 1325. After three years he returned via a land route across the center of the Asian continent, intending to visit Pope John XXII at Avignon to request more missionaries, but fell ill at Pisa and returned to die in his home monastery of Udine. The *Relatio* avows that his motives were those of a missionary—“I crossed the sea and visited the countries of the unbelievers in order to win some harvest of souls”—but that detail is thought to have been added by Odoric’s posthumous promoters, and his book is unlike those of other missionaries in important respects.⁷¹ For one, Odoric did not write it himself. A version was apparently dictated to a fellow friar, William di Solagna, in 1330 and reworked by various subsequent scribes. It appears to have been influenced in part by Marco Polo’s book. For another, it enjoyed significant popularity in its day. The other missionary works exist in only one or two manuscripts, while Odoric’s book survives in around 117 manuscripts (ten of which postdate c. 1500) in Latin (approximately sixty), Italian, French, and German

copies.⁷² “Sir John Mandeville” plundered the book for his fictional travels.

The process of the book’s production remains mysterious. No doubt it was truly informed by Odoric’s own experiences, but its mélange of eyewitness impressions, ethnography, hagiography, biblical geography, and oriental *mirabilia* produce a shifting and uncertain narrative. The Latin authors responsible for its earliest manifestations, who were probably involved in ultimately unsuccessful efforts to see Odoric canonized, are among a large number of copyists and later translators who adapted and transformed the text according to reader interest. The existence of vernacular versions indicates a significant lay as well as ecclesiastical readership, but this may have varied from one location to another. Marianne O’Doherty argues on the basis of manuscript comparisons that English copies are mostly in Latin and their readers mostly educated scholarly and/or monastic men, whereas Italian copies are more often vernacular, often part of miscellanies, and aimed at lay audiences. If manuscript survival rates are an accurate guide, English readers treated the book, along with others such as Carpini’s *Historia*, Polo’s’s *Divisament*, and *The Letter of Prester John* with which it was sometimes bound, as a serious work for scholars interested in the geography, ethnography, religions, and natural history of the Indies, while Italian readers were often more dubious about its authority but entertained by its accounts of diverse lands and *mirabilia*.⁷³

To turn away from missionaries and double back a little in time, we come to Hetoum of Armenia’s *La flor des estoires de la terre d’Orient* (1307).⁷⁴ Dictated first in French to scribe Nicholas Falcon during Hetoum’s stay at the papal court in Poitiers in 1307, Falcon himself produced a Latin version later that year at the request of Clement V. It survives in around sixty manuscript copies mostly in Latin and French and became widely popular in the early era of the printing press.⁷⁵ Hetoum (Hayton, Haiton, or Hethoum, before 1245–c. 1310/14) was an Armenian monk, probably a canon regular of the Premonstratensian order, though previously married and a father.⁷⁶ Hetoum’s visit to Clement V at Poitiers was prompted by desire to see a joint crusade mounted for the reconquest of Jerusalem. Although in part a work of crusade propaganda, *La flor* surveys geography and peoples from Cathay to Syria and is valued by modern scholars particularly for its third book, a history and description of Mongol peoples. Glenn Burger believes Falcon had little input into Hetoum’s text, given the text’s accuracy on dates and claims about Mongol history and culture,⁷⁷ but the involvement of an amanuensis should be taken into account. Moreover, it is unlikely that Hetoum undertook any eastern travel, although his uncle, King Hetoum I, had traveled on

a diplomatic mission to Karakorum in 1254–55 and an account was produced.⁷⁸ We must therefore acknowledge the secondhand nature of much of his material and its propagandistic purpose. Hetoum's relatively positive account of the Mongols, for example, should be read with the understanding that he hoped to persuade the French pope to form a crusading alliance with them.

While missionaries maintained their hopes for eastern converts, Italian merchants kept up their small but steady flow to India and China. Francesco Balducci Pegolotti's guidebook for merchants, *Libro di Divisamenti di Paesi* (Book of the Descriptions of Countries), named *La Pratica della Mercatura* by its eighteenth-century editor, was produced sometime between 1335 and 1343 and survives in a single manuscript. Pegolotti was not a traveler but worked for the Bardi Company, and his book is a thoroughly practical work of advice and information on long-distance trade.⁷⁹ It is valued by travel historians for its information for merchants wishing to make the journey to Cathay: grow one's beard; obtain a Turkish translator, some good male servants, and perhaps "a woman" at Tana to assist on the journey; and obtain a certain amount of provisions. Although lacking in ethnographical information on the peoples of the East, the book indicates that trade and travel between Italian merchants and Asia were not uncommon at the time. Indeed, Pegolotti claims the road from Tana to Cathay is "perfectly safe" (*sicurissimo*) by day or night.⁸⁰

Niccolò dei Conti (c. 1395–1469) was a Venetian trader whose observations on India and southeast Asia are preserved in book 4 of Poggio's *De varietate fortunae* (1448).⁸¹ The genesis of the book was unusual. Niccolò returned to Venice in 1439 after around twenty years of travel across the Indian Ocean to India, Burma, the islands of southeast Asia, and possibly Champa (southern and central Vietnam). Following a confession to the pope that he had been obliged to adopt a false Muslim identity and dress for his personal safety while abroad, he was required as penance to dictate an account of his travels to the papal secretary, humanist scholar Poggio Bracciolini, which he did in Florence. *De varietate fortunae*, true to its name, is a study of the vicissitudes of fortune, beginning with a description of the ruins of ancient Rome and a meditation on Rome's passage over time from greatness to decay (book 1). Books 2 and 3 deal with the turbulence of more recent history, before Poggio turns in book 4 to the more pleasing topic of Niccolò's travels, hoping "it may serve for relaxation and at the same time turn the minds of the readers from the severity of fortune to a gentler fate, so to speak, and to the pleasant vicissitudes of things."⁸² Joan-Pau Rubiés nonetheless emphasizes the serious and scholarly intention of the work and locates it within Poggio's broader humanist endeavors to found a new era of secular

scholarship and the quest for objective information about the world.⁸³ The book was quite popular: Merisalo lists thirty-one extant manuscripts of the full work or first two books and a further twenty-three containing fragments of the first or fourth book.⁸⁴ Niccolò's account garnered special attention and was soon detached from the remainder of Poggio's work and circulated independently as a work of travel literature, *India Recognita* (1492), and subsequently translated from Latin into Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and English.⁸⁵ A shorter independent discussion of Niccolò and his travels appears in the travelogue of Spanish nobleman Pero Tafur, who says he met the Venetian with his "Indian" wife and their children in Egypt on Niccolò's homeward journey in 1437.⁸⁶ Niccolò's experiences, then, come to us only via Poggio and Tafur. The version in Poggio's book is presented in Latin rather than in the Venetian or other vernacular in which it was presumably dictated and no doubt involved Poggio's selection and reorganization. The book must be seen as a collaborative work, with Poggio's own authorial intentions and inclinations brought to the fore. These were both to provide the reader with useful and interesting information and to give pleasure.⁸⁷

Four other accounts from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries will merit brief mention. Ruy González de Clavijo (d. 1412) was a Castilian nobleman who traveled to the court of Temür in 1403–4 as ambassador for Henry III of Castile.⁸⁸ His testimony is valuable chiefly as witness to the new Turkic-Mongol regime of the early fourteenth century and the splendid court at Samarkand. Johann ("Hans") Schiltberger (c. 1381–1430) is a hazy figure, by his own account a Bavarian soldier captured by Turks at the battle of Nicopolis in 1396 and subsequently enslaved by Temür and various of his kin and vassals. If we are to believe him, Schiltberger spent around thirty years in servitude to these eastern potentates before finally escaping while on campaign near the Black Sea and returning to Germany in 1428. The circumstances of his book's composition are unknown. Though it is written in a Bavarian dialect, it may have been dictated. Four fifteenth-century copies survive and it was often printed in the early modern era.⁸⁹ Hieronimo di Santo Stefano was a Genoese merchant who left a short tale of travel to the East Indies via the Coromandel Coast of India around 1499. He has been little regarded by modern scholars; consequently, not much can be said about the book's composition or circulation.⁹⁰ The Bolognese Ludovico de Varthema (c. 1470–1517) is the last of our authentic travelers, having made a voyage to India via Arabia in 1502–8.⁹¹ His *Itinerario* was printed in Italian in 1510, was soon translated into Latin, and remained popular through the sixteenth century with many vernacular translations. Significant doubts hang over the authenticity of parts of

his narrative, and indeed it seems unlikely that he ventured beyond the Bay of Bengal to Burma and the eastern Spice Islands as he claims.⁹² Ludovico is interesting as a representative of a new breed of traveler in the sixteenth century—that is, of a practically motiveless traveler, who undertakes journeys for their own sake out of a thirst for novelty rather than for specific diplomatic, mercantile, or missionary purposes. His was also a work of travel writing produced for the age of print with the new sense of a potentially unlimited audience.⁹³

To these reports by genuine travelers we must add fictive travelogues often regarded as true by medieval readers. One work stands above all others in this respect: the *Book* of “Sir John Mandeville.” With about 300 manuscripts surviving across Europe in around ten languages, it had far greater popularity than many of the other great works of medieval literature commonly studied in modern universities.⁹⁴ No serious reader now believes the author undertook the voyage described, though he may at some point have traveled to the Holy Land, and many think his nom de plume is borrowed or invented. For a long time Jehan de Bourgogne (“Jehan le Barbe”), a Liège physician, was presented as a candidate for authorship, and there have been various alternative hypotheses.⁹⁵ M. C. Seymour and John Larnier favor Jean le Long (Jan de Langhe), abbot and historian at the Abbey of St. Bertin in St. Omer in northern France in the mid-fourteenth century, chiefly because he had benefit of access to a large monastic library that contained Mandeville’s identifiable sources and in 1351 had produced French translations of a number of these (Hetoum, Odoric, and William of Boldensele, as well as Ricold, “The Book of the Estate of the Great Caan” and some letters from the Khân to Pope Benedict XII). Odoric’s book, Vincent of Beauvais’s encyclopedia (notably Vincent’s excerpts from Carpini), Hetoum’s *La flor*, and *The Letter of Prester John* were the Mandeville author’s most important sources for the far eastern parts of his narrative, though some also believe he must have read Marco Polo’s book; Polo’s influence, alternatively, may have been filtered through Odoric.⁹⁶ Jean le Long’s contemporary and disciple at St. Bertin, Thomas Diacre, completes the picture with a vivid description: “A man who was erudite, pious, who delighted in the study of history, and had such a large belly that he could hardly walk, nor could he sleep unless he were sitting.”⁹⁷ However, Christiane Deluz and Michael Bennett are among those who have recently argued for English authorship.⁹⁸

A book composed from so many fragments, by an author whose identity and motive remain uncertain, resists definitive summary of its purpose. Iain Macleod Higgins, one of the foremost recent authorities on Mandeville, offers an appealingly non-dogmatic assessment of the *Book’s* nature. It “represents a new kind of work that attempts to

entertain, instruct, persuade, chastise, challenge, and console its imagined audience,” and its author is “an entertainer, teacher, moralist, and geographer, as well as a trickster and an artist.”⁹⁹ Higgins recommends that readers embrace the heterogeneity of the *Book* and the diversity among its myriad versions rather than seeking a “best text” or trying to identify a single message among its “sometimes unsettling contradictions” and argues that it is more than a compilation of existing texts and its author no mere plagiarizer. In his view, the Mandeville author achieves a kind of originality in his collation, revision, and “sometimes inspired overwriting of its sources” and that one of its goals is to place the marvelous East as envisioned by previous authors “under the sign of Christian history.”¹⁰⁰

Johannes Witte de Hese’s book provides a less well-known fictional travelogue. Scott Westrem, its editor and translator, explores how the author “combined reading, conversation and fantasy to construct a unique image of the world.”¹⁰¹ Next to nothing is known about Witte, whose name itself may be a fiction, except that he appears to have been Dutch and possibly a cleric. He claims to have traveled eastward on pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas via Jerusalem, Egypt, Sinai, and Ethiopia, then carried on to the Land of Prester John, India, China, the Earthly Paradise, Purgatory, and an island of extraordinary races and beasts. This all supposedly took place in the late 1300s, and the earliest manuscript of the book is datable to about 1424. Westrem, while taking the book’s fictional status as obvious, points out that fifteenth- and sixteenth-century readers “accepted it as a source of generally factual information” and it was not until the eighteenth century that its veracity was challenged.¹⁰² The *Itineraries*’s distinction lies in its effort to link widely diverse geographic and mythical locations within a Christian framework. Also, like Mandeville, the author seems to have done his work in a scriptorium, although he does not make his borrowings as obvious as his predecessor does.¹⁰³ Westrem counts eight Latin and three Dutch manuscripts in current collections and numerous incunabule and sixteenth-century Latin and Dutch printed copies, but as three of the surviving manuscripts are merely handwritten copies of an early printed edition the work probably had a limited pre-1500 audience.¹⁰⁴ Ethnographic or practical details are of no interest to the author; his East is a Christianized world of marvels.

The final item on our tour is *The Letter of Prester John*, chronologically the earliest of our chief sources as well as the most broadly influential. The *Letter* was a major source for both Mandeville and Witte and indeed in some ways a foundational text for all late medieval travel writing.¹⁰⁵ It was produced probably around 1165, and though it purports authorship by a magnificent Indian priest-king,

it was almost certainly written in Latin by a western European author. It contains very little that its author could not have picked up from sources widely available in Europe.¹⁰⁶ In a classic essay, Bernard Hamilton argues the *Letter* was produced for imperial propagandistic purposes on behalf of Frederick Barbarossa. The identity of Prester John and his Christian kingdom were drawn from two earlier texts. The first of these, by Odo, abbot of St. Rémi at Reims and independently by an anonymous source, described the meeting of a mysterious “Indian” archbishop (named “John” in the anonymous text) with Pope Calixtus II in Rome in 1122. The second, from 1145 (just after the Fall of Edessa in 1144), was Otto of Freising’s account in *The Two Cities* of “a certain John, king and priest, who lived in the extreme east beyond Armenia and Persia” and had won a major victory against the Persians. Hamilton makes the case for the *Letter*’s forgery in support of Barbarossa’s quest to establish imperial power over his papal rival: “In the utopian world of the Indies supreme power in both church and state was vested in the Priest King. Prester John’s kingdom mirrored the kind of empire which Barbarossa was trying to establish.”¹⁰⁷

The *Letter*’s evocation of a spectacularly rich Christian kingdom in the distant East, presided over by a ruler who was at once priest and king, possessed a powerful and flexible appeal for European readers well beyond the reign of Frederick Barbarossa. Generations of crusaders and their promoters took heart from the notion of a vast realm under Christian kingship somewhere to the east of Saracen territory.¹⁰⁸ The ongoing significance of the *Letter*, for our purposes, lies partly in the continuing quest for Prester John in Asia and, from the early fourteenth century, Africa.¹⁰⁹ Carpini, Simon of St. Quentin, Rubruck, Marco Polo, Monte Corvino, Jordan, Odoric, Mandeville, Witte, and Niccolò all speak of Prester John as a true king, contemporary or historical.¹¹⁰

The widespread popularity and shifting content of the *Letter* indicate its appeal went beyond both propagandistic and crusading impulses. There are more surviving copies of *The Letter of Prester John* than almost any of the travel narratives discussed in this book, rivaled only by Mandeville, with over 260 manuscripts in Latin and many vernaculars.¹¹¹ As a relatively short piece it presumably had the advantage of cheapness and seems to have been purchased by readers of varying social backgrounds. An interesting instance of this is the copy in Oxford, Bodleian MS Digby 86, a late thirteenth-century “layman’s common-place book or miscellany.”¹¹² Its Anglo-Norman and Middle English contents include prayers, devotional works, charms and prognostications, romances, fabliaux, humorous lyrics, games and party tricks, medical recipes for people and hunting birds,

and other useful tidbits including different procedures for removing unwanted guests and malignant spirits from a house. The largely lighthearted content of the manuscript might reveal the *Letter's* entertainment value.¹¹³ In contrast, a number of the *Letter's* manuscripts were found in monastic and scholars' libraries.¹¹⁴ These audiences perhaps responded to the theme of moral utopia in the Prester's Christian Indies, where all travelers and pilgrims are greeted with hospitality and there are no poor, thieves, plunderers, flatterers, or liars, as well as no avarice, division, adultery, or vice.¹¹⁵

The Letter of Prester John would have satisfied a range of desires for educated laymen, friars, and enclosed monks. Its vivid evocation of a vast distant realm of incredible fertility, riches, and marvels must have met a European hunger for the exotic and wonderful. Prester John describes his own dominion in almost biblical terms: "If you truly wish to know the magnitude and excellence of our Highness and over what lands our power dominates, then know and believe without hesitation that I, Prester John, am lord of lords and surpass in all riches which are under heaven, in virtue and in power all the kings of the wide world."¹¹⁶ His land contains all manner of exotic beasts and monstrous peoples, from elephants and dromedaries to one-eyed men and Cyclopes.¹¹⁷ "Milk is flowing and honey abundant," and it produces pepper in large quantities. The river Ydonis, with its source in Paradise, flows throughout the realm and contains precious gemstones.¹¹⁸ The *Letter* devotes most of its latter section to a description of Prester John's own palace, adorned and indeed partly constructed of gems, crystal, and gold reminiscent of Revelation's description of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9, 18–21).¹¹⁹

The Letter of Prester John seems at first glance to be the definitive account of eastern alterity—and has been plausibly construed as such by recent scholars¹²⁰—yet the biblical imagery and cadences of its prose fasten it securely to the traditions of the European, Latin imagination. Indeed, it could be said to evoke Sameness as much as Otherness. Prester John is an eastern potentate who provides a shining model of what western rulers would like to be. The king and his people—and this can hardly be too strongly emphasized—are Christian. In the cultural context of high and late medieval western Europe, where religious faith served as the ultimate marker of identity, these eastern Christians are like long-lost brothers or spiritual kin: "We wish and long to know if, as with us, you hold the true faith and if you, through all things, believe our lord Jesus Christ. ... I am a devout Christian, and everywhere do we defend poor Christians. ... We have vowed to visit the Sepulcher of the Lord with the greatest army, just as it is befitting the glory of our majesty, in order to humble and defeat the enemies of the cross of Christ and to exalt his

blessed name.”¹²¹ Later versions of the *Letter* made Prester’s realm even more definitively the West’s spiritual twin. The French printed translation of c. 1500 affirms, “And since you say that our Greeks, or men of Grecian race, do not pray to God the way you do in your country, we let you know that we worship and believe in Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one Deity and one true God only.”¹²² Prester John is not only a Christian but a true Christian, upholding the Trinity unlike the schismatic Greeks. Indeed, he warns against “false and treacherous Hospitallers,” whom “we have killed in our country as it should be done with those who turn against the faith” and against “those treacherous Templars and pagans.”¹²³ His may be a land of crocodiles and camels, not to mention horned men, anthropophagi, Amazons, centaurs, pygmies, unicorns, and dogheads, yet theologically Prester John has more in common with the French king who is by now the *Letter*’s co-addressee than with the perceived enemies of Latin Christendom who lie on or within its borders.¹²⁴

Through this diverse body of sources, which we may gather under the heading of medieval “travel writing,” Europeans of the Latin West embarked on bold new textual voyages. The Mongol incursions of the early thirteenth century had revealed the world was far larger and more diverse than either classical or biblical authorities had suggested. Once European travelers began to make their own journeys deep into the Asian continent they immediately began to record their observations and experiences, and audiences at home responded with enthusiasm. The boundaries of the world were suddenly expanded. Previously unknown peoples and cultures came into view; eastern cities, landscapes, and natural wonders began to stir the European imagination. To some extent the authors and audiences of these new books sought to fashion eastern realms in conformity with familiar structures of thought; thus monstrous peoples, the Earthly Paradise, mythical beasts, and biblical waterways recurred in certain texts but most particularly in the fictional travels of Mandeville and his ilk. However, the writings of genuine travelers—while certainly not immune from traditional imagery, especially when amanuenses and later copyists made their own mark—painted pictures of Asia with many details entirely new to European readers. For the modern reader intrigued to explore these, it is tempting to jump straight to the content of medieval travelogues, but this would be to overlook their textual production, literary form, and the responses of contemporary readers. Considering the production of travelogues requires much more than straightforward examinations of authorship. When we try, as twenty-first-century readers, to come face-to-face with Odoric, Rubruck, Marco Polo, and others we find ourselves chasing fleeting ghosts. Trying to confront fictional travelers such as Mandeville or

Johannes Witte de Hese is even more confounding, as they recede like Cheshire cats. Through considering matters of audience, textual transmission, and relative popularity we may arrive at a more grounded understanding of the resonances of writings on the distant Orient for medieval readers.

Chapter 3

Travel Writing and the Making of Europe

“Travel writing” is a modern term for a recognized branch of literature, but we need to consider its suitability to medieval texts. Many modern readers, as we will see, find some medieval “travel” texts disappointing because they fail to live up to certain expectations, such as that travel literature presents a first-person narrator with an exciting tale of encounters with the foreign or that it documents the formation of both personal and cultural identity. Not only a version of personal memoir, travel writing also allows the author to explore the broader cultural encounter of Self (for example, “the West” or “Europe”) and Other (“the East” or “Orient”). Can travel writing exist without a first-person narrator, need it incorporate the kind of individual reflection most likely to engage modern readers, and to what extent did medieval descriptions of far eastern places adopt a perspective one might truly call “European” in an era before European identity was necessarily a strong preoccupation?

This chapter finds that our expectations about the nature of travel writing need to be reset before we can fully appreciate medieval reports of Asia and that concepts of European identity, as opposed to a notion of Christendom, are identifiable but not yet dominant during this early stage of European-Asian encounter. It contends, and the remainder of the book will illustrate, that while responses to Otherness presented a common refrain in many travelers’ tales, sameness, similarity, or a sense of relationship between a traveler and peoples newly encountered were also regular motifs. When foreignness and estrangement were asserted, it was often for particular pragmatic reasons or because the authors in question were fictional travelers more prone to repeating old stereotypes of nomadic barbarians or the marvels of the Indies. Curiosity and the hunger for knowledge, it is argued, were at least as important as either hostility or wonderment for many of our authors and their audiences.

“Travel” as such is not usually the main subject of works produced out of late medieval encounters with the far Orient, though details of journeys feature particularly in Carpini’s, Rubruck’s, Odoric’s, Clavijo’s, Witte’s, and Ludovico’s books and to some extent in Marco Polo’s. Some of these (notably Rubruck’s and sometimes Odoric’s) were given the title *Itinerarium* in manuscripts, but it would be futile to pin great significance to contemporary titles given that they vary so much from one manuscript to another. More than half the works pay little or no attention to the subjective experience of travel. On what grounds, then, are they labeled “travel writing” here, and would medieval readers have viewed them as having anything in common?

The new interdisciplinary field of “travel writing studies” has put some energy into defining travel writing as a genre and asks whether it is indeed a genre at all. There is some agreement that works so named should contain matter drawn from actual or imagined journeys, even though in some cases the journey itself is not described. The style or form in which that content is expressed may, however, vary substantially and include itineraries or travelogues, letters, diaries, guidebooks, and geographic, ethnographic, or chorographic description.¹ Does “genre” refer primarily to the style of text or its thematic content? Hans Robert Jauss’s concept of “horizon of expectations” would encompass both, but in the case of travel writing it seems unproductive to focus too much on form.² Joan-Pau Rubiés, a specialist in late medieval and Renaissance travel writing, focuses on content in offering a flexible yet precise definition:

[Travel literature] can be defined as that varied body of writing which, whether its principal purpose is practical or fictional, *takes travel as an essential element for its production*. Travel is therefore not necessarily a theme, nor even a structuring element, within the body of literature generated by travel. ... The crucial point is that the writer, who could easily be an armchair writer, ultimately relied on the materials and authority of first-hand travelers.³

This capacious formulation has the virtue of applicability to travel texts from any era or cultural context and is better suited to describing late medieval travel writing than definitions suggested by specialists in modern travel books. It does not require “travel writing” to provide a descriptive first-person account of a journey undertaken, for example, as Jan Borm and Tim Youngs do:

[Travel writing] is not a genre, but a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel. ... [The travel book is] any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator and principal character are but one or identical.⁴

[T]ravel narrative is always controlled by the first person singular. Predictably, therefore, questions of identity are frequently to the fore, suggesting the degree to which physical travel often tends, in its writing, to become symbolic of interior journeys of the mind or soul.⁵

Mary B. Campbell, one of medieval travel writing's greatest interpreters, also makes the subjective perspective a definitive element: "Travel literature is defined here as a kind of first-person narrative, or at least a second-person narrative (as in the travel guide: 'thence you come to a pillar near the chamber of the holy sepulchre')." ⁶ As her example indicates, the personal viewpoint is a common feature of medieval pilgrimage literature.⁷

While many late medieval travel texts dealing with the distant East do involve a first-person narrator who undertook a journey, or pretended to have done so, some take the form of a *descriptio* of distant lands more than an *itinerarium* through them. This is particularly the case for Ricold's *Liber peregrinacionis* (despite its title), Hetoum's *La flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient*, Jordan's *Mirabilia descripta*, "Le livre de l'estat du Grant Caan," and Poggio's account of Niccolò dei Conti's observations, but even Marco Polo's book is more chorography than travelogue.⁸ Pegolotti undertook no journey himself, yet his account of the merchant's route to Asia can be understood as "travel writing" according to Rubiés's definition as it is based on information provided by travelers. The odd one out among the items discussed in this book is the anonymous *Letter of Prester John*, which is not known to be based on the testimony of actual travelers. Despite its lack of perfect fit with Rubiés's classificatory scheme, the *Letter's* later influence determines its inclusion.

The matter of a travel narrative's truth status is more vexed for medieval texts. In modern travel-writing studies, whether or not a narrative is *actually* true—or, rather, has its basis in lived experience and observation—is not so relevant; what matters most is that readers generally believe in its veracity. In Borm's words, a "referential pact" exists between author and reader. The "horizon of expectations" (in Jauss's famous phrase) a reader brings to a work of travel writing includes the belief that it is based to a degree on real experience.⁹ Scott D. Westrem concurs that "the success of a travel book depends on a thread of faith extending from narrator to audience. Only when a traveler's experience is accepted at least tentatively as legitimate can travel's lessons—whether meant to be informative or entertaining—be learned."¹⁰ But as we saw in Chapter 2, medieval accounts of the distant East were widely but not invariably seen as authentic. It is perhaps better to set aside the requirement for credibility in drawing tentative lines around what we might count as medieval travel writing.

One way to address the question of whether medieval audiences would have perceived the texts gathered here as having anything in common is to look at their manuscript contexts. While sometimes the longer works, especially the *Divisament*, are found alone in their bindings, they were much more often bound up with several other texts of our interest. To take a handful of examples from dozens of potential exempla, Bern, Burgerbibliothek Cod. 125 contains French versions of Marco Polo, Mandeville, Odoric, “L’estat du Grant Caan,” Hetoum, and Ricold along with William of Boldensele’s itinerary of pilgrimage to the Holy Land and letters exchanged between the Great Khân and Benedict XII; London, BL MS Additional 19513 contains the unique surviving copy of Jordan’s *Mirabilia descripta* and Pipino’s version of Marco Polo along with the first book of Jacques de Vitry’s *Historia Hierosolimitana*, Marino Sanuti’s book on the Holy Land, and an abbreviated version of Gerald of Wales’s *Topographia Hiberniae*, along with some non-travel literature; London, BL MS Arundel 13 contains only Marco Polo and Odoric; London, BL MS Royal 14 C xiii (owned by Simon Bozoun, Prior of Norwich, 1344–52) contains Rubruck, Odoric, and Marco Polo along with works by Jacques de Vitry and Gerald of Wales among others; Cambridge, UL MS Dd. i. 17 contains Marco Polo, Hetoum, and Mandeville among numerous other works.¹¹ The regularity with which works on eastern contexts (both in the Holy Lands and farther east) are bound together (though we need to be cautious about the possibility of postmedieval compilation) suggests owners and readers perceived relationships among these kinds of texts, though many of the manuscripts in question also contain works that had nothing whatever to do with travel including lists of European archbishoprics, cures for worms in children, saints’ lives, Aesop’s fables, and treatises on urine. What, then, did they have in common? In addition to the spiritual edification supplied, especially by works on the Holy Land, they filled a European hunger for learning about faraway peoples. They supplied visions of oriental realms, often associated with the ancient notion of the “Indies” but also lands brought more recently into the spotlight such as Mongolia and China that helped satisfy a craving for knowledge, and were particularly prized when they fired the imagination too. A chief difference between their expectations and those of more recent readers, however, is that medieval readers did not regard a first-person account of the journey or a meditation on personal development as essential elements in making a work valuable and interesting. If travel writings are texts that take “travel as their essential condition of production,” then it is reasonable to put the works being considered in this book in this category. “Ethnographic writing” is another postmedieval term that has been applied to medieval travel writing with excellent results

but perhaps does not have quite the range suggested by “travel writing.” Ethnography is, primarily, writing about human cultures; travel writing naturally encompasses this but also takes in matters of climate, geography, and other natural phenomena and does not imply the scientific distance that the former term properly holds.

It is worth considering further the ways medieval travel books often seem to disappoint or confuse modern readers, no doubt because they have become accustomed to common elements in recent travel literature. These include a distinctive authorial personality, forward narrative momentum, and a persistent emphasis on the strangeness of worlds encountered, whether that strangeness takes the form of the charming, bizarre, contemptible, savage, or ridiculous. In Campbell’s words, “travel literature as we know it today [is] ... fully narrative, fully inhabited by its narrator, self-conscious about the problem of presenting difference in terms that neither inadvertently domesticate nor entirely alienate.”¹² The importance of strong authorial presence is in keeping with the powerful desire to denote Self as separate from Other, which many scholars see as central to modern travel writing. Casey Blanton states that “travel books are vehicles whose main purpose is to introduce us to the other, and ... typically they [dramatize] an engagement between self and world.”¹³

Medieval travel writing’s failure to meet some modern readers’ horizons of expectation helps explain their often mixed, contradictory, or negative reactions to Marco Polo’s *Divisament dou monde*. Descriptions of the *Divisament* vary so much, whether by popular or scholarly writers, one might think the readers had picked up different volumes:

In the account of Marco Polo—*Il milione*, to Italians—we have the most balanced and lush of all medieval re-creations of the East: the grotesque titillations of [*The Wonders of the East*] and the splendor and fertility of Paradise are here combined in a single comprehensive image. It was that “mirage” that drew Columbus to our shores.¹⁴

Yet the book is surprisingly dull. Polo did not set out to write an account of his travels, despite the name by which it has always been known [*sic*]. ... Instead he wrote a dry, factual guide to commerce in the East, a book by a merchant for other merchants, containing mainly lists of the merchandise available for sale on the caravan routes, as well as advice on how to overcome the difficulties that might be met along the way. ... It is not a romance, nor a book of wonders, nor a history of the world in the manner of Herodotus.¹⁵

Marco Polo travelled to tell a fantastic story. He is singularly obsessed with difference and the desire to represent it. The world that sprouts from Marco Polo’s pen is as strange as the dreamscape of old fables. The text authorizes its vocation to capture this world by invoking the imperial command of the Great Khan himself, who, Marco Polo says, “would rather hear reports of these strange countries, and of

their customs and usages, than the business on which he had sent them.”¹⁶

Unfortunately, those who actually read the *Description of the World* will discover that much of Marco Polo’s account of the East does consist of tons of salt and distances. Though these descriptions are sometimes intermingled with stories about Caliphs and Magi, they are fundamentally practical and, even without following a logical itinerary, the book serves more as a merchant’s view of the world than that of a creative writer.¹⁷

Marco Polo, whose rather limited vocabulary for describing marvels does not seem to have undercut the popularity of his descriptions, called the peacocks of the East “larger and more beautiful,” asserted that ostriches there were “as big as donkeys” and chickens “the most beautiful in the world,” and concluded enthusiastically, “in fact everything is different! ... almost every animal he met (the “horrible” crocodile as well as the “beautiful” giraffe) was a marvel.”¹⁸

Thus readers are split between those who value Polo’s book as a typically medieval repository of wonders and those who feel let down by the lack of precisely those same marvels. They find it dull because the *Divisament* gives little sense of the author’s personality or the tribulations he may have endured on his odyssey. Others allege that it represents an early instance of colonialist discourse. Casey Blanton quotes Polo’s rather out-of-character description of the inhabitants of Zanzibar, a country he never visited and whose inhabitants must have been described to him by another traveler (perhaps an Arab seafarer), concluding, “Marco Polo’s assumptions that the other is a demon or beast is [sic] a prelude to the long and complicated history of aggression upon indigenous peoples that characterizes the works and acts of Western Renaissance explorers.”¹⁹ Here, as one sees quite often, Marco Polo stands as the forebear of later uses of travel writing to help justify harsh treatment of non-Europeans. Campbell’s often brilliant and poetic *Witness and the Other World* claims in its opening sections that many of the medieval works she will examine, one of which is Polo’s book, “begin or end with explicit references to the future conquest of the lands or peoples described”—a claim not subsequently verified—and that “[t]he specter of the American holocaust will fade into the background of this study. But it haunts the whole.”²⁰ Yet such haunting is not apparent in her own sensitive readings of medieval writings on the East.

Syed Manzurul Islam reads the *Divisament* as a precursor to modern imperial racism, repeatedly naming the book a “machine for othering.”²¹ This is, in my view, stunningly wide of the mark. When Polo’s book was composed c. 1298 he had been back in Italy only three years; the whole of his prior adult life (from age seventeen to forty-one) had been spent in Asia. The Great Khân’s empire was not a place he had any wish to represent as “Other”; rather, he seems to

have wanted to convey, in a proud, perhaps even proprietary tone, the splendors of a realm he identified with and wished to promote. In parts, it is not so much a “machine for othering” but for “sameing,” or at least for “making similar.”²² A related view, though not dealing with Marco Polo, is Andrea Rossi-Reder’s contention that “[i]n *Wonders of the East*, India is identical to the India depicted by [E. M.] Forster,” that classical and medieval western perceptions of a monstrous Indies constituted an aspect of an “incipient colonial or even a proto-colonial discourse to assert Western superiority and justification for dominance over the strange creatures encountered,” and that “[t]he Eastern creatures in works such as Ktesias’s *Indika* and *Wonders of the East* are clearly the precursors of colonialist images of Indians.”²³

John Larner, in contrast, considers and rejects a number of genres earlier scholars have suggested for the *Divisament*: adventure story, merchant’s manual, missionaries’ handbook, and book of wonders, suggesting finally that it should be considered primarily a work of geography or rather chorography.²⁴ He wonders if Polo was influenced by Chinese authors, given that nothing in European tradition is quite like his book, and suggests its schizophrenic style was the result of dual authorship with Polo providing the mundane “raw material” and Rusticello spicing up the prose with marvels and the exotic.²⁵ This may be too neat, but Larner’s reading has the virtue of acknowledging the diversity and inconsistency within Marco Polo’s book and of attempting to assess it on its own merits.

Where many are baffled by the *Divisament* and disparaging of its author, modern readers tend to sing the praises of William of Rubruck. Rubruck’s account of his mission to the Mongols at Karakorum in 1253–55 satisfies expectations of travel writing where Polo’s book fails: exciting narrative; distinctive personality; emphasis on the strangeness of worlds encountered; and endurance in the face of danger and hardship.²⁶ Campbell appreciates Rubruck’s book for having “a plot and a character”: “It satisfies curiosity, answers questions that never occurred to Marco, such as How did you get there? What was it like? Were you afraid?” When Rubruck adds a detail such as his frozen toes at the Karakorum camp he takes us into his moment of experience with a vividness, she argues, that Marco Polo entirely lacks.²⁷ Major scholars of medieval travel literature from Sir Henry Yule and William Rockhill to Leonardo Olschki, Christopher Dawson, and John Larner express a special regard for William of Rubruck and his book.²⁸ Campbell even suggests Rubruck was “Europe’s first modern traveler” and that the qualities of his book “were not of his time.”²⁹ Modern readers have also been captivated by the fourteenth-century narrative of the Moroccan Ibn Battuta, who

claimed to have traveled as far as southern China, which provides an adventure story complete with swaggering hero.³⁰

Against the ambivalent modern reactions to Marco Polo's book and the praise heaped on William of Rubruck's one must set the uncomfortable fact that few people in medieval Europe read Rubruck's book (although it was drawn upon by Roger Bacon, as previously discussed), while Marco Polo's was a sensation—widely copied, translated, and influential. As noted in the previous chapter, there are five surviving manuscripts of Rubruck's book, four of them in England and all in Latin, and around 150 manuscripts of the *Divisament* in Latin and many vernaculars, scattered across European collections.³¹ Much has been lost between the medieval period and the present, including the aesthetic sense and brand of curiosity that made Marco Polo's book of greater appeal than Rubruck's. Medieval travel books will generally disappoint readers hoping to be taken on a quasi-biographical journey of conscious engagement with the world, composed with a linear narrative and literary flair; we need to appreciate them for their contemporary appeal.

However, by the early sixteenth century a taste for the modern mode in travel writing was already emerging. Lincoln Davis Hammond contrasts the relatively impersonal style of Poggio's book of Niccolò's experiences with Ludovico de Varthema's *Itinerario* of 1510 and argues that Ludovico represents a new kind of traveler.³² Where medieval travelers had particular purposes—usually mercantile, missionary, or ambassadorial—and produced works shaped by their motivations and overwhelmingly influenced by later scribes and readers, Ludovico enjoys travel for its own sake.³³ Where Poggio's humanistic desire was to provide a body of useful knowledge, Ludovico added an acknowledgment of the reader's desire for vicarious experience of the dangers of the journey: "whereas I procured the pleasure of seeing new manners and customs by very great dangers and insupportable fatigue, they will enjoy the same advantage and pleasure, without discomfort or danger, by merely reading."³⁴ He tells of how he left Alexandria "longing for novelty (as a thirsty man longs for water)."³⁵ The passive reader is invited to project himself onto the figure of the adventurer, and the armchair traveler is born.

Marco Polo's book may not have been a "machine for othering," but concepts of Otherness underlie rather a lot of recent scholarship on travel writing. These draw on insights regarding modern colonialism in which the West is seen as needing to emphasize the strangeness of the non-West in order to buttress its own sense of identity and to justify claims to superiority.³⁶ In colonial discourse the Other may be demonized, stereotyped, caricatured, stigmatized,

denigrated, and even dehumanized in the political effort to claim superiority for colonizer and justify acts of conquest and dominion. Homi K. Bhabha states, "The object of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction."³⁷ Modern travel writing is one among many genres in which textual representation of other peoples and cultures is implicated in colonial domination: "Travel and its cultural practices have been located within larger formations in which the inscriptions of power and privilege are made clearly visible. ... There is a sense in which all travel writing, as a process of inscription and appropriation, spins webs of colonizing power."³⁸ The Orientalizing, possessing, imperial eye, in this view, can rarely be absent.³⁹ Peter Rietbergen, in his 1998 cultural history of Europe, states, "Everything, including Europe, exists only by virtue of its contrast or its opposite. Moreover, everyone has an 'unknown side,' some characteristics of fears and desires, which define that person. Man, European man as he defines himself, has made and known himself only through a confrontation with the 'other.'"⁴⁰

Mary B. Campbell, Michael Uebel, and Michèle Guéret-Laferté are among those who have argued for medieval texts' construction of a strange eastern Other to aid in the formation of European identity.⁴¹ Matters of the alienation or at least discomfiture experienced by particular travelers in eastern locations should of course not be ignored. William of Rubruck's statement that upon entering Mongolian territory "it seemed indeed to me as if I were stepping into some other world [*aliud saeculum*]" has often been quoted.⁴² Yet my own view coincides closely with Albrecht Classen's assessment that "intolerance might well have been the birthmark of the early modern age, whereas in the Middle Ages the relationship between 'self' and 'other' was still a matter of complex and open-ended negotiation," and with Paul Freedman's persuasive dismissal of any easy application of anxieties about "Otherness" to medieval perceptions.⁴³ Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that definitional boundaries are not only drawn by appeal to binaries and opposites. They are also made by recourse to synonyms—by drawing attention to similarity and sameness as much as to difference. This is, after all, the principle on which modern dictionaries work. The development of a European identity was aided by its reading public's interest in places and peoples akin to them as well as alien.

Moreover, the relationship between medieval European and Asian regions was by no means one of a submissive, feminine East to the masterful, masculine West, as in Said's construction of Orientalism. Europeans were conscious of the much greater military might,

economic force, and social organization found in various eastern contexts. Even when writing of places with simpler and poorer societies, such as parts of southeast Asia, it was not with a colonial or imperial eye. When travel writers offered negative views on eastern peoples this was due to the threat the latter posed as actual or potential enemies to Christian Europe (especially in depictions of Mongols up to the late thirteenth century) or due to ancient European bias against unsettled peoples. With regard to the latter, W. R. Jones has demonstrated how medieval authors inherited ancient Greek and Roman views of “Barbarian,” “sylvan,” or nomadic peoples as belligerent, cruel, lawless, deceitful, and senseless.⁴⁴ To Cicero, for example, *sylvestres homines* were truly “brutes” barely distinguishable from wild animals, lacking in all reason, law, discipline, or civility and likely to eat raw human flesh and drink blood from skulls. Early medieval authors added “pagan” to this list of defects. Barbarian imagery was successively applied to Cimmerians, Scythians, Celts, and Germans, and by the thirteenth century the Mongols had become the obvious target; later it would be the turn of the Turks. In subsequent chapters we will see that not only nomadic Mongols but also some southeast Asian villagers were more often constructed through images of barbarism such as anthropophagic habits and monstrous morphology than were the dwellers of the great cities of China and south India. Yet even while we pay heed to such ancient influences, we must be wary of assuming that medieval travel writers imposed a simple template on the peoples observed. This will be particularly apparent in the complex perspectives on Mongolians supplied by such intelligent observers as Carpini and Rubruck.

“Europe”

What, then, was “Europe”? Denys Hay’s 1957 work on the medieval formation of European identity insists on a distinction between Europe and Christendom. He argues that the latter, which had already existed from late antiquity to refer to a more abstract body of the Christian faithful without territorial limits, began to emerge as a geographical entity and political identity with the Muslim expansion of the sixth to ninth centuries and became stronger during the period of Gregorian reform and the production of crusading propaganda from the late eleventh century.⁴⁵ In Hay’s exercise in “historical semantics,” however, “Europe” is found to have been employed very sparingly by writers before the later thirteenth century, most often in geographic texts or cartography.⁴⁶ The scriptural tradition of the partition of the world between the three sons of Noah—Asia to Shem, Africa to Ham, and Europe to Japheth—was elaborated in Latin and vernacular

writings across the medieval centuries and this, too, helped keep the idea of Europe culturally current. Yet before the later thirteenth century, Europe “is a word devoid of sentiment, Christendom a word with profound emotional overtones.”⁴⁷ This began to change, Hay argues, with the late medieval crisis of confidence concerning papal authority arising out of the “Babylonian captivity,” Great Schism, and Conciliar movement, which were damaging to Christian unity. The situation was compounded by the Reformation movements of the sixteenth century. In the meantime Humanists were turning to the word “Europe,” which had appeal for its classical resonances, and the development of *portolani* (maps charting shorelines) gave the geographic outline of Europe clearer visual expression. The process was slow, however, and it was not really until the eighteenth century that “Europe” fully supplanted “Christendom” as a magnet for loyalties and site for the projection of personal and group identities. (Even today it remains a fragile unity without a singular linguistic, religious, racial, legal, or political identity.) Jeffrey Jerome Cohen is also skeptical, suggesting that “Europe” as a unifying concept is a fairly recent fiction.⁴⁸

On the other side, there have been several attempts to supply a genealogy of Europe in recent years, especially since the formation of the European Union in 1993. Jacques le Goff finds references to “Europe” scattered in a number of early and high medieval texts and argues ardently for a medieval conception of Europe.⁴⁹ Robert Bartlett, in his magisterial account, argues for its emergence by the later Middle Ages. “By 1300,” he asserts, “Europe existed as an identifiable cultural entity.”⁵⁰ He examines the emergence of “Christendom” (the region under the spiritual jurisdiction of the pope, following the rites and liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church) as a territory and “Christian” as a racial category, though “Europe” and “European” are not studied in the same fashion.⁵¹ William Chester Jordan’s essay on the subject, which argues strongly for a sense of unity within the Latin West from the eleventh century, avoids the terminological problem by averring that people “rarely used the word Europe (Latin, *Europa*)”; instead their “word of choice ... was *Christianitas* (Christendom).”⁵² The view of Timothy Reuter is that “Europe” (though not “Europeans” so much) emerged “to denote the Roman, Latin-speaking lands to the north of the Mediterranean” between 300 and 600 CE and that although it appears only infrequently in medieval texts it retains a continuity as a way of expressing an “usness” (*Wir-Gefühl*) even within polyethnic early medieval empires and should be seen as far from negligible before the late Middle Ages.⁵³

Particularly relevant to the present book is Felicitas Schmieder’s

contention that European contact with Mongols and journeys to eastern regions in the thirteenth century constituted a “world historical moment,” as from that time some Latin Christians became increasingly aware of themselves as Europeans and chose “Europe” rather than “Christendom” to convey a collective identity.⁵⁴ We might add that in 1241, according to Matthew Paris’s *Chronica majora*, Emperor Frederick II wrote to King Henry III of England imploring for help in countering the Mongol onslaughts, and his letter moves from speaking of “the whole of Christendom [*totius Christianitatis*]” to “the West [*Occident*]” and “the European empire [*imperialis Europae*].” His letter identifies Germany, France, Spain, England, Almaine, Dacia, Italy, Burgundy, Apulia, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and Norway, each with its own virtues in valor and topography yet together lying under “the royal star of the West [*sub occiduo cardine regio*]” in a manner indicating a conception of Europe composed of autonomous powers and united not only by Christianity but also by military cause against a common enemy. However, his is not a modern way of thinking about Europe: Frederick’s “European empire” is his own domain as Holy Roman Emperor and his key conflict is with the papal leader of Christendom.⁵⁵

Clearly “Europe” existed as a medieval construct: what is more difficult to determine is how widely its influence was felt among the kinds of readers who sought out travelers’ accounts of the far Orient. For our purposes, it is interesting to note that at least one Irish person in the fifteenth century, Prince Finghin MacCarthy Reagh, wanted a copy of Marco Polo’s *Divisament* translated into his vernacular so that he could read it alongside lives of Irish saints and a historical narrative of Patrick’s conversion of pagan locals to Christianity.⁵⁶ We cannot be sure what the basis of the Irish reader’s interest in Polo’s book was, but it is intriguing that a fifteenth-century Irish prince could have found relevance in a thirteenth-century Venetian’s description of distant oriental lands. This shared interest could be called “European,” for want of a better word, without going overboard in seeking to identify the components of European sensibility. Medieval inhabitants of what we now term Western Europe possessed cultural commonalities—however loose and fragmentary—that gave them certain preoccupations and attitudes; however, they did not often seek to articulate or define these commonalities. “Europe” existed but was not yet so important that it needed detailed and frequent discussion.

More pressing, perhaps, is to seek medieval perceptions of a secular Eurocentricism. This is a different task from identifying a sense of *Christian* superiority. Presumption of the truth and authority of Christianity—in this case, Latin Roman Christianity—over all other

religions was after all a prerequisite of the faith. Religious pluralism was not a feature of medieval Catholicism, though it was possible for medieval Christians to look favorably on aspects of non-Christian religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism even if in the case of missionaries their positive views were influenced by optimism about the chances for conversions to Christianity.⁵⁷ Frederick II's letter to Henry III certainly qualifies as an assertion of European might. Another statement of European superiority has been identified in the writings of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, the thirteenth-century encyclopedist, in his *De proprietatibus rerum*. Akbari states that his chapter on "Europa," building on Isidore of Seville, revises notions of the primacy of Asia by arguing for the superiority of northern (that is, European) people by virtue of their cold climate. The cold breeds white men with closed pores who are "more full and huge" of body and "more bold and hardy" of spirit than other men. Africans, because of burning sun, are black and short and the heat causes their spirits to pass through their open pores, making them "more cowards of herte." Men of Asia are in the middle of these two extremes, though we should also note Bartholomaeus's statement that Europe is "pere [peer]" to Asia "in nombre and noblete of men."⁵⁸

In the travel literature of our present focus, Eurocentrism of a secular sort was not entirely unknown but not a dominant motif. Jordan Catala asserts in his *Mirabilia descripta* that "there is no better land, no more beautiful, no people so honest, no foodstuffs so good or savoury, no dress so handsome, or manners so noble, as here in our own Christendom; and, above all, we have the true faith, though it be ill-kept," and though he refers to "nostra Christianitate" rather than "Europa," the former in this instance designates a worldly as well as spiritual entity.⁵⁹ Another statement of European superiority, though with specifically military connotations, is Carpini's assertion that the wily Mongol forces may be defeated if engaged in battle "because they are fewer in number and weaker in body than the Christian peoples."⁶⁰ "Mandeville" states his English nationality in the opening and closing sections of his *Book* in a way that might be taken for a kind of fictional patriotism, though not Eurocentrism as such. As we will see in Chapter 7, however, it was more common for medieval travelers to the far Orient to remark on the superiority of *eastern* realms and cultures, especially Chinese.

Early modern specialists would need to answer the question of whether imperialist and colonialist enterprises in the Americas, Africa, and parts of Asia changed European self-perception dramatically, but in 1613 English travel anthologist Samuel Purchas made an assertion of European superiority that does seem novel in its hyperbole and in the range of endeavors covered. Europe surpasses other continents, he

writes, not only in climate and in geographical advantages but also in people, cities, and great powers. Where else, he asks, do we find “such resolute courages, able bodies, well qualified minds?” What other lands are so “fortified with Castles, edified with Townes, crowned with Cities?” Purchas claims superiority for Europe in its “Arts and Inventions.” Asia and Africa may have supplied the birthplaces for the “Liberall Arts,” but Christian Europe is now preeminent in learning, “Mechanical Sciences,” “Musicall Inventions,” cooking, horse management, chemistry, the making of paper, mills, guns, printing, and all manner of scientific advances. “China yeelds babes and bables in [printing and guns] compared with us and ours: the rest of the World have them borrowed of us or not at all.” The military prowess of European nations is also unsurpassed, as are their feats of exploration. Europeans, moreover, are more than any other people God’s chosen, and few others will be saved. The European right to mastery over Africa, Asia, and the Americas, “almost every where admitting Europæan Colonies,” is thus proclaimed.⁶¹ Purchas’s claim for *European greatness in every respect* is not echoed in medieval travelers’ accounts of the Orient. It is, therefore, worth stressing that Eurocentric attitudes are not eternal but have a history. Even such an authority as Anthony Pagden can sketch a straightforward line of European sense of technological superiority from Herodotus through medieval crusaders and missionaries to Vespucci, stating that “[a]fter Columbus’s discovery of America and the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope ... the European belief in the capacity of European science to dominate the world became *even more* assertive.”⁶² Such linearity is simply not justified.

During the period c. 1245 to c. 1510, then, “Christendom” endured but was ailing, and “Europe” existed but was yet to be fully asserted. In the late medieval period the concept of Europe, as a region united not only by papal lordship and adherence to the Roman rite but also by a sense of ethnic and cultural unity, was gaining momentum as a replacement for the Christendom of the high Middle Ages but in relatively undeveloped form. Without a universal feeling of European cultural superiority, and without the sense of racial unity that later theories would endow—such as Blumenbach’s linking of European peoples under the banner of “Caucasian”⁶³—the idea of Europe was not in the forefront of authors’ minds when penning their accounts of distant Easts. As a result, the motivation to portray Asian peoples as Other to the European Self was not a pervasive theme.

Curiosity, Wonder, and the Desire for Knowledge

Medieval travelers’ responses to distant Orientals were multifaceted.

One cannot identify a single or dominant impulse guiding their texts or indeed the expectations of their audiences. One was the desire for hard information about peoples and places. This prevailed particularly in descriptions of Mongols, as the patrons of diplomatic travelers needed intelligence dossiers to help combat that new foe and consider options for alliances. Many of the missionary travelers also sought to provide their superiors with data on local populations and the friars' successes with conversions. A further explanation may be proposed for late medieval interest in travel writing that applies particularly to works that were not produced to satisfy any obvious and immediate need and yet became the most widely reproduced. That is, readers of these books were seeking answers to big questions confronting them and their time. How does one live in a city? What should we eat? How should we dress? How should we talk? How should we conduct our sexual lives? What constitutes ideal femininity and masculinity? What is courtliness? What kinds of luxury should be admired? What is beautiful? In short, what should we be? How should we live?

In late medieval Europe the “primarily agrarian, feudal, and monastic”⁶⁴ characteristics of early and high medieval Europe were gradually giving way to a more urbanized and mercantile society with growing interest in political theory and a splendid court culture. Fashion was emerging among the aristocratic elite, who also began to enjoy increasingly luxurious households and personal etiquette. Domestic and urban rituals were employed for the staging of power as a form of theater. At the same time the cataclysms of famine, plague, and warfare plunged European people into frequent periods of instability and hardship. Long detailed works like that of Marco Polo were popular partly because they dealt with so many topics that were of interest in a changing Europe: how to exchange currency, how to send information, how to enjoy life, how to govern well, how to organize a city, how to ensure food supply. The *Divisament* presents the idealized figure of Khubilai Khân as a model of benevolent governance and lauds his great palaces, fine dining, courtly entertainments, festivities, and hunting expeditions as exemplary of noble life.⁶⁵ Such topics were of increasing interest among European nobility, gentry, and, in certain regions, mercantile elites.

Recent scholarship on curiosity and wonder in late medieval and early modern Europe can help frame our discussion of readers' desires. “Curiosity” might be defined as an essentially intellectual or cognitive impulse to seek causes of phenomena and thus expand the range of human understanding, while “wonder” is a primarily affective response to the mysteries and diversity of God's creation. Many historians have asserted that curiosity was considered a vice in the Middle Ages and came to be appreciated as a path to new knowledge

only during the course of the early modern period.⁶⁶ Peter Harrison, for example, has argued that patristic authorities, citing the Genesis narrative on the Creation and Fall, identified curiosity as an impulse that was useless at best and at worst could lead to greater sins of pride, vanity, or a desire to be akin to God. In Augustine's view it was a trait characteristic of pagans, heretics, and necromancers, a form of concupiscence that was to be condemned as it corrupted the mind rather than the body. Such views, says Harrison, endured in clerical discourse down to the Renaissance era and were overturned in the seventeenth century, paving the way for modern scientific thought.⁶⁷

However, Edward Peters offers a more complicated overview, noting that while *curiositas* was viewed warily by many Christian authors who remarked on its capacity to augment the vices, its connection with travel and gaining knowledge of the world through personal experience or study was by no means incompatible with the Christian ethos. To be a Christian was indeed to be a traveler, a pilgrim: "the actual existence of the Christian was a *peregrinatio*, the existence of a stranger in a strange land. ... Christians were to consider themselves *viatores in peregrinatione, homines viatores*."⁶⁸ Pilgrims, kings, and indeed all Christians had reason to be curious about the world that God had created, and with the broadening of European mental horizons following the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century their version of "holy curiosity" took in a vastly expanded geography. Citing Friar Pipino's pious preface to Marco Polo's *Divisament*, Peters asserts, "If the variety of the world, its 'secrets' in this sense, existed to demonstrate to man the power of his Creator, then failure to encounter that variety might be considered a failure in religious duty."⁶⁹ Richard Newhauser also argues for a more finessed understanding of *vitium curiositatis*, emphasizing that it should be thought of as *excessive* curiosity and considered in relation to the specific concerns of moral thinkers such as the perceived secularization of theological studies and teaching and exaggerated care for worldly matters. Not every medieval mention of *curiositas*, he points out, should be read as indication of *vitium curiositatis*. Seriously seeking knowledge was not sinful.⁷⁰

Wonder is an impulse or response with less investment in the goal of reaching understanding of phenomena through cognitive processes than is implied by curiosity. It is a condition of fascination, of hunger for what is outside oneself, which may or may not lead to comprehension.⁷¹ Wonder—*admiratio*—had a respectability in medieval theological thought that the *vitium curiositatis* was frequently seen to lack as it avoided dangers of intellectual pride and the wish to approach an omniscience properly pertaining only to God. Some things, it was thought, reached beyond "ability to comprehend and

explain; and such marvels as werewolves, hybrids, and miracles, for all their tortured reflections, remained the object of admiration and amazement and wonder rather than simply of appropriation and analysis and generalization.”⁷² The medieval sense of wonder is impossible to reduce to a single definition, as Caroline Walker Bynum’s article on the subject demonstrates, but was an emotive and intellectual response to unfamiliar or extraordinary phenomena that could manifest as awe, pleasure, dread, or horror.⁷³

The worlds and peoples described in some medieval travel writing were inspired by a wonder impulse, where the representation of the marvelous, including much that does not look strange to modern eyes, is enough in itself, inspiring pleasure, awe, disgust, or other affective responses. The accounts found in other travel writing, or the responses by other readers, were guided by the desire to learn of distant worlds and peoples: that is, they were guided by serious curiosity. Yet in many works the two impulses seem to be blended. New knowledge was sought to satisfy a range of needs. Some were pragmatic—strategic, military, or mercantile. Carpini’s *Historia* and Pegolotti’s manual for merchants, for example, served essentially practical aims. Other works, such as the epistles of John of Monte Corvino and the other early Franciscan missionaries to China, served a combination of spiritual and pragmatic ambitions, offering their readers encouraging views of evangelical prospects in the East. We have seen that Roger Bacon explicitly justified the importance of geographical knowledge on evangelical and eschatological grounds in his *Opus majus*. Yet the translation of many of the key texts into various vernaculars and their transmission among secular as well as clerical readers suggest much more varied appeal. It was also during this late medieval period that interest in instructional, courtesy, and conduct literature began to take hold. The great age of the conduct book would not come until the early modern period when print made improving literature available to a much wider audience, but one sees the beginnings of the phenomenon from the later thirteenth century. Works on governance such as the *Secretum secretorum* and Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum* were widely copied and translated; manuals of advice on proper gendered behavior began to emerge; and by the mid-fifteenth century, under the influence of the elaborate Burgundian courts, one sees a growing preoccupation with household ritual among the aristocracy and interest in personal manners and hygiene.⁷⁴ Travel writing does not share conduct literature’s prescriptiveness—the ways of life that it holds up for examination could serve as models to follow or to avoid—but the two discourses developed at around the same time and for some of the same purposes. [Chapter 7](#) of the present work, titled “Civility,” explores some aspects of oriental city and court

culture held up as exemplary for European readers.

Conclusion

There was a utopic quality to some medieval writing on the distant East. The human need to believe in possibilities for a better life found some succor in travelers' visions of the East. In Oscar Wilde's much later words, "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing."⁷⁵ The spirit of Wilde's statement may have made some sense to medieval readers although the language of utopianism had yet to be invented. The travel writing of the later Middle Ages was not in some way an inferior precursor to a true travel literature but, instead, appealed to its readers because it spoke to *their* interests and concerns which happen in many cases to be different from ours.

Travel and the quest for knowledge go hand in hand, as Roxanne L. Euben argues in one of the most stimulating recent contributions to travel-writing studies: "[F]rom Bacon's characterization of travelers as 'merchants of light,' to Montesquieu's description of his fictional Persian travelers as searchers after wisdom, to Nietzsche's contention that 'we must travel, as old Herodotus travelled' in part because '[i]mmEDIATE self observation is not enough, by a long way, to enable us to know ourselves,'" travel recurs.⁷⁶ I have suggested that late medieval readers looked to travel literature not only to know but also to change themselves and their society, while also indulging in the many pleasures of the text and in their long-held myths of oriental marvels. They felt that the cultures of the East held much that was not only, variously, horrifying, strange, or marvelous but at times also admirable and instructive. While pragmatic or spiritual aims guided the production of certain texts, many of the books that resonated most for contemporary readers were those that inspired new ideas about how to live and presented an enticing vision of a world without want. They were produced within a period on the cusp between a spiritually defined "Christendom" and a "Europe" that was primarily secular in conception. Late medieval travel writing on the Orient had a part to play in the making of that Europe.

PART II

Envisioning Orients

Chapter 4

Food and Foodways

The act of eating expresses profound, even intimate, acceptance. Conversely, undesirable food is met with involuntary signs of repulsion. Alimentary disgust, suggests Julia Kristeva, “is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection.”¹ Acceptance or rejection of food shows others one’s similarities to and differences from them and provides an instantly comprehensible basis for connection or distance. If you eat what I do, or if I can imagine eating your food though it is not a habit for me, we can relate. We possess *commensality*—we may “dine at the same table.” It is not surprising, then, that eating habits have become essential ingredients of modern ethnography and anthropology: “Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart.”² Observations on “foodways,” which are all the activities of a cultural group relating to their consumption of food, have become a standard part of modern travel writing, too. A growing historical literature has begun to explore premodern European food and foodways, not out of antiquarian curiosity but in recognition of their key cultural role. As Ken Albala observes, “Food preferences, being so central to identity, are perhaps even more revealing than taste in other media. If a picture speaks a thousand words, then what of the dish that savors of the homeland, or displays wealth and elegance, or smacks of simple frugality? Each of these tells a complete story about the person who eats it.”³

Caroline Walker Bynum’s classic study of gender and food practices alerted historians, who (she suggested) had become unduly distracted by modern obsessions with sex and money, to the importance of food and eating in medieval culture. She attributes food’s centrality in medieval societies largely to the perpetual fear of dearth: “In our industrialized corner of the globe, where food supplies do not fail, we scarcely notice grain or milk, ever-present supports of life, and yearn rather after money or sexual favors as signs of power and success. ... [W]e should not really be surprised to find that food

was, in medieval Europe, a fundamental economic—and religious—concern.”⁴ Hunger and even famine confronted many Europeans at some point in their lives, food production and eating habits were closely tied to seasons and weather, and food and eating helped define individuals by social status as well as reinforce their sense of identity as Christians, Jews, or Muslims. Foodways deserve a central place in our analyses of medieval cultures.

Comments on foodstuffs, dining habits, abundance or lack of produce, the role of food in religious rituals, and strange eating habits such as alleged anthropophagy are among the most common themes in medieval travel writing on distant Easts. Marco Polo’s *Divisament dou monde* includes mention of local produce and eating habits repetitively throughout his chapters on far eastern places, and Odoric’s *Relatio* shares this fascination; indeed, none of the major late medieval descriptions of eastern travel neglects the subject of food. To an extent, our authors drew on ancient Greek and Roman habits of defining foreign peoples by eating customs, such as the *Rhizophagi* (root-eaters), *Struthophagi* (ostrich-eaters), *Ichthiophagi* (fish-eaters), *Galactophagi* (milk-eaters), *Panphagi* (anything-eaters), and *Anthrophophagi* (human-eaters), but they brought their own new preoccupations to the theme.⁵

When they wrote about oriental food and eating, medieval travel writers satisfied a range of desires for information and pleasure that were partly dependent on the location described but also inseparable from the motivations of the authors, amanuenses, and audiences. Travelers to Mongolia describe extreme scarcity and eating habits perceived as revolting. This information helped with the compilation of intelligence reports on a fearsome people in the context of immediate fears for political safety but also tapped into ancient prejudices about nomadic peoples. While in many respects the information was a reasonable representation of actual conditions, it also at times emphasized or exaggerated foreignness. Other writers, especially travelers to India and China, comment on sheer fertility and food abundance, taking influences from literary conventions of “Indian” plenitude as well as observation of actual conditions. Accounts of Asian foodways reveal preoccupations with famine that were especially poignant in the context of fourteenth-century European shortages, such as descriptions of the Great Khân’s provisions for famine relief in Yuan China. Readers were sated by revelations of oriental plenitude and extravagance but also by the more dubious pleasures of alien horrors, especially anthropophagy. In contrast with the more consistent stereotypes associated with modern Orientalism, precolonial engagements with eastern cultures were varied, ranging from abjection to glorification and at times held up

some Asian societies as offering models from which Europeans could learn and benefit.

Foodways of the Enemy

In the mid-thirteenth century, the Mongol Empire continued to represent a significant threat to European security. Although the immediate danger to western Europe had receded with the death of Ögödei in December 1241 and subsequent Mongol withdrawal from Hungary, the inhabitants of kingdoms and territories of the West could not be sure the terror would not come again. Moreover, the conquest of Russia and Batu's establishment of the Golden Horde was in its early stages.⁶ "Tartars" remained a ferocious presence on the borders of western Europe. Yet it was only a few years after the Hungarian withdrawal that papal embassies led by Carpini, Ascelin, and Andrew of Longjumeau (1245–51) were sent to engage in dialogue with Mongol leaders and to return with precious information on the enemy.⁷

Though some Mongol groups practiced limited forms of agriculture and their territories included mountainous and forested regions, the vast treeless plains of their homelands were more conducive to nomadic pastoralism. Carpini says they are "extremely rich" in camels, oxen, sheep, goats, and especially horses and mares but lack pigs or other farm animals.⁸ The absence of trees, he says, requires food to be cooked at fires made with cattle and horse dung, and "[n]ot one hundredth part of the land is fertile, nor can it bear fruit unless it be irrigated by running water," though water is itself in short supply. The land is adequate for grazing cattle but could not be called good for that. He writes, "To conclude briefly about this country: it is large, but otherwise—as we saw with our own eyes, for during five and a half months we travelled about it—it is more wretched than I can possibly say."⁹

For our authors, food scarcity is among the most notable features of Mongolian life.¹⁰ Carpini, who attempts to list Mongolian good points alongside bad, praises their willingness to "share their food with each other, although there is little of it." They are "also long-suffering. When they are without food, eating nothing at all for one or two days, they do not easily show impatience, but they sing and make merry as if they had eaten well."¹¹ Marco Polo makes similar remarks, telling how Mongols will live on the blood of living horses if need be, and the Spaniard Clavijo in the early fifteenth century concurs that "[t]hey suffer cold and heat and hunger and thirst more patiently than any other nation in the whole world," gorging when food is available but subsisting on sour milk when it is not.¹² Carpini's vivid description

of their markedly unfussy eating habits is less complimentary:

Their food consists of everything that can be eaten, for they eat dogs, wolves, foxes and horses and, when driven by necessity, they feed on human flesh. For instance, when they were fighting against a city of the Kitayans, where the Emperor was residing, they besieged it for so long that they themselves completely ran out of supplies and, since they had nothing at all to eat, they thereupon took one out of every ten men for food. They eat the filth which comes away from mares when they bring forth foals. Nay, I have even seen them eating lice. They would say, "Why should I not eat them since they eat the flesh of my son and drink his blood?" I have also seen them eat mice.¹³

The Tartar Relation repeats the tale of anthropophagous besiegers, tells another of Chinggis ordering the eating of one man in ten during an arduous desert trek, and echoes Carpini on Mongols' unclean diet of wolves, foxes, dogs, carrion, afterbirths, mice, and human flesh.¹⁴ Joinville's account of Tartars, probably drawing on reports by Andrew of Longjumeau, asserts Mongols eat no bread but live on flesh and milk, and favor horseflesh, which they lay raw between their saddlecloths and saddles until all the blood is pressed from it then eat it raw. Joinville interjects that he knew a Khwarazmian (an inhabitant of approximately modern Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan) who guarded him in prison and who had some of this meat in his bag: "[W]hen he opened his bag we had to stop our noses; we could not bear the putrid stench which came out."¹⁵ Johann Schiltberger's narrative repeats the detail about pressing salted meat beneath saddles; he adds that they will bleed their horses and cook and drink the blood.¹⁶ Rubruck, who offers a greater level of detail throughout his reports of Mongol eating habits, acknowledges a little more culinary discernment: they will eat mice with short tails, marmots, conies with long tails, and many other "little creatures which are good to eat, and which they are quite able to tell apart," but they refuse to eat mice with long tails, giving them to their birds instead.¹⁷ He does not repeat the rumors about eating human flesh. Mandeville follows Vincent of Beauvais's extracts from Carpini and Simon of St. Quentin, emphasizing the meagerness and meanness of their diets—eating dogs, lions, and even mice and rats—and their unclean habits, such as wiping their dirty hands on their clothes, eating without tablecloths or napkins, and failing to wash dishes. He omits the references to devouring human flesh, though he alleges a wartime habit of cutting off the ears of the slaughtered and sousing them in vinegar to eat.¹⁸ A crude illustration accompanying Mandeville's *Book* in London, BL MS Harley 3954 shows a Tartar eating small black creatures, possibly rats, while a beast lies dead on the ground and three viewers gesticulate in horror.¹⁹

Many European food staples are said to be practically nonexistent among the Mongols. Carpini states they lack bread, herbs, and vegetables, and though they eat meat they have "so little that other

people would scarcely be able to exist on it.” Their summer staple is mare’s milk “in very great quantities”; in winter they (except the wealthy) lack even this and instead drink water in which millet has been boiled, along with a little broth and meat in the evenings.²⁰ Rubruck agrees, saying that in summer “as long as their *comos* [fermented mare’s milk, *ayiragh* in Mongol or *kumis* in Turkic] holds out, they care for no other food,” and “[w]ith the meat of a single sheep they feed fifty or a hundred men.”²¹ Carpini’s account of the journey to the camp near Karakorum shows the friars shared in their hosts’ hunger en route, eating little but millet with water and salt: “[W]e could scarcely keep alive, for the food provided for four was barely sufficient for one.”²² Rubruck also complains about the starvation rations: “Were it not for the biscuit we had, and God’s grace, we might well have perished”; his companion wails, “I feel as if I have never eaten.”²³ Rubruck laments that during their long journey their guides gave them nothing to eat before evening but a little millet, though they had meat and plenty of broth in the evenings.²⁴ In contrast, Pegolotti advises prospective merchants traveling from Tana to Cathay that although they should take enough flour and saltfish to last the journey, they would be able to procure sufficient other provisions, especially meat, along the way.²⁵ Perhaps merchants would have taken a more southerly path through present-day Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and would have been spared the worst of the steppe conditions. What the Mongols lack in gluttony they allegedly make up in drunkenness, as Carpini, Rubruck, and Ricold all attest, imbibing extraordinary quantities of kumis when they could get it, drinking till they vomit then drinking again.²⁶ Andrew of Longjumeau also comments that their favorite drink is horse’s milk brewed with herbs.²⁷

Food scarcity is portrayed as such a potent presence in Mongolian life that wasteful habits meet with draconian punishments. To pour out any milk, food, or other drink on the ground is a serious evil, and, says Carpini, “if anyone takes a morsel and, unable to swallow it, spits it out of his mouth, a hole is made under the dwelling and he is dragged out by that hole and without any mercy put to death.” They avoid washing dishes, pots, or spoons, except to swill them with some meat broth then add this back to the meat pot, and even extract the marrow from bones before giving them to the dogs. Rubruck comments that they put meat bones away in their carry bags for gnawing on later.²⁸ Carpini’s secondhand account of Chinggis Khân’s rise to power offers an historic explanation of waste prohibition. Returning from campaign the Mongol army

fresh entrails of an animal; they took them and, putting aside only the dung, they cooked them and brought them before Chingis Chan, who ate them with his men. As a result of this Chingis decreed that neither the blood nor the entrails nor any part of an animal that can be eaten, with the exception of the dung, is to be thrown away.²⁹

Hunger was also a recurrent theme of Chinggis's life in Mongolian legend. *The Secret History of the Mongols* tells of his mother Hö'elün's widowhood and tribal abandonment when he was a child and her attempts to nourish her children with whatever she could forage.³⁰ The tremendous value of food is also apparent in Mongol religious practice. Carpini says they always offer the first milk from mares and cows and the first portion of each meal to their idols. They give the idol the heart of a slaughtered animal in a cup—though the next morning they thriftily take it back to cook and eat. Their veneration of the sun, the moon, fire, water, and the earth is marked by first offerings of food and drink. Dead men are buried in one of their tents, seated at the table with meat and milk before them.³¹

European accounts of Mongolian food and foodways are thus dominated by infertility of the land, lack of recognizable staple foods, willingness to eat unclean meats, habitual drunkenness, and subsistence on blood or even human flesh when necessary. With the exception of anthropophagy (which will be considered in more detail later in the chapter) and perhaps drunkenness, this seems a largely fair representation of Mongolian conditions but also has rhetorical value. No doubt Mongols acquired the ability to endure hunger interspersed with periods of gorging on high protein and calcium foods, given the severe continental conditions of much of their homeland and predominantly nomadic habits. Dependence on meat and milk is still a mark of Mongolian cuisine today and doubtless was even stronger 750 years ago. Yet if an army marches on its stomach, it is hard to see how even the staunch Tartars could have maintained their ferocity for long on a diet of horses' blood, fermented mares' milk, and the occasional small rodent.³² Remember Carpini's remark that the land is "extremely rich" in horses, camels, oxen, sheep, and goats. Mongols were herders who moved over wide areas to gain pasture for their beasts; they were also keen hunters.³³ Medieval travel writers emphasize scarcity and willingness to eat foods beyond perceived margins of edibility not only to represent reality but also to define and construct Mongol characteristics.

One rhetorical purpose is to heighten the impression of Tartars as the most hardy, ferocious, and belligerent of men. Despite Carpini's measured tones in the ethnographic chapters of his book ([chapters 2–4](#)), his later warnings about the dangers they pose as untrustworthy and ruthless enemies are explicit: "It is the intention of the Tartars to bring the whole world into subjection if they can" (in this, Carpini

was correct); on no account should Christian countries enter peace treaties with them because of the “intolerable” servitude to which they reduce conquered nations. They are “full of deceit,” speaking fair words at first but afterward stinging like a scorpion, though he also feels they can be defeated because of their small population and their weak bodies compared to those of Christians.³⁴ His message is, therefore, somewhat mixed: the Mongols are a terrible foe, yet ultimately defeatable. The emphasis that he and other travelers place on capacity for hunger endurance and willingness to eat even vermin and carrion helps convey this dual message: the scarcity that signifies their toughness also indicates potential military weakness.

Connected to this characterization is the ancient image of the barbarian, though this is more often implicit than stated outright in our travelers’ books. The belligerence, cruelty, and deceit Carpini attributes to Mongols were also conventional traits of barbarians, as were their filthy eating habits.³⁵ The Mongols’ lack of bread and dependence on flesh and milk are especially revealing. Bread is among the most venerable signifiers of civilization in western traditions. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the wild man Enkidu is tamed and civilized when brought in from the steppes where he has roamed with the beasts and lived by suckling their milk and taught to sit at a table, drink beer, and eat bread.³⁶ In Homer’s *Odyssey*, danger befalls “men, eaters of bread” when they sail into the land of the lotus-eaters whose intoxicating food has the power to make them forget their families and the way home.³⁷ In Mandeville’s and Witte’s descriptions of some eastern monstrous peoples (discussed in Chapter 8), failure to eat bread while instead living off meat, milk, or raw plants are common identifiers for the barely or partially human.³⁸

Yet travelers do not impose a simple template of barbarian imagery on Mongol peoples. “Tartars” are not undisciplined or without law, which are other conventions of the trope. They may (according to Carpini) be “dirty in the way they take food and drink,” lack tablecloths and napkins, and wipe greasy hands on leggings or grass, but they are not devoid of dining etiquette.³⁹ Rubruck comments on the formal dining arrangements witnessed at the imperial court.⁴⁰ Hetoum, whose motive of persuading the pope to form an Armenian-Mongol-French crusading alliance made his account of the Mongols more positive, states they are generous and courteous in sharing their food and if others are not quick to share in return they do not hesitate to take supplies by force.⁴¹ A Mongolian law stating “[w]hen a wayfarer passes by people eating, he must alight and eat with them without asking for permission, and they must not forbid him this” echoes Hetoum’s account of Mongol hospitality.⁴²

Descriptions of Mongolian food and eating habits reinscribed the

estrangement felt by European travelers toward their hosts. If to eat is to accept and to share food is to signal cultural conviviality, European revilement of Mongol dearth and primitive or unclean ingestion indicates alienation. Still, the travelers could probably have gone further in emphasizing strangeness, if that were their sole aim. Despite Carpini's claim of anthropophagy, most of these authors do not portray the Mongols as ravenous human-eaters and drinkers of human blood in the way earlier thirteenth-century authors did, as will be discussed later in the chapter. Simon of St. Quentin's account provides an exception, but we have only Vincent of Beauvais's extracts. Carpini's and Rubruck's depictions of Mongol food scarcity and the ability of this people to survive on so little and eat foods that would be found inedible by most western Europeans powerfully convey foreignness but stop short of a deeper demonization. Rather, given the texts' pragmatic and military purposes, they reemphasized what hardy people Mongols were, with extraordinary powers of endurance, but also suggested a chronic underlying weakness that might be their undoing.

Plenty in a Time of Famine

Depictions of Chinese, Indian, and southeast Asian fertility could hardly offer a starker contrast to Mongolian scarcity. They became well-known to European readers by the early fourteenth century, when the Mongol threat had become a matter of memory and history and Yuan China was viewed as a model of abundance and civility. It is interesting, then, that the growing popularity of books on Asia, especially Marco Polo's, coincided with the arrival of deadly famine in northern Europe. By the summer of 1316 hunger and weakness had begun to lay waste to the population. In parts of the Low Countries around 10 percent of the population died in 1316 alone and the famine hardly abated before 1322.⁴³

The "Great Famine" of 1315–22 was a northern European phenomenon, brought on by a series of severely cold winters and wet summers beginning in 1310 and exacerbated by the pressure of thirteenth-century population growth combined with the poor yields associated with contemporary agricultural methods. William Chester Jordan shows that typical thirteenth-century yields were between two and ten bushels of grain for every one sown, and a ratio of around three to one was common even in the relatively fertile fields of northern France. Modern yields are closer to two hundred or three hundred to one.⁴⁴ Hardship was worsened by warfare and livestock murrains.⁴⁵ In 1316 Jan Boendale, an Antwerp chronicler, wrote, "The people were in such great need that it cannot be expressed. For the

cries that were heard from the poor would move a stone, as they lay in the streets with woe and great complaint, swollen with hunger.”⁴⁶

Marco Polo’s Venice, like other cities and regions of southern Europe, was largely spared this particular famine, but hunger and food shortages were familiar to all Europeans. In Jordan’s words, “every experienced adult in premodern Europe appreciated something of the danger of famine.”⁴⁷ Fernand Braudel comments that France, one of the more fertile regions of Europe, regularly experienced widespread shortages, and this does not include the far more regular occurrences of local famines.⁴⁸ The evidence on medieval food availability is not all bleak, however. Indeed, to Braudel, the late medieval diet was a carnivore’s delight.⁴⁹ His broad-brush account is modified by narrower studies, such as Christopher Dyer’s on late medieval England that indicates serious shortages in early eleventh- and late twelfth-century England and bad years around 1290–1320 but improvement after 1375 with a smaller postplague population, relatively cheap grain, more meat in the average diet, and better harvests until around 1520.⁵⁰ Despite the importance of acknowledging the good as well as the bad, it is clear that food shortages and the distress of hunger were familiar and recurring aspects of life for many Europeans, especially before the late fourteenth century.

In contrast, travel writers portrayed the easternmost regions of the world, especially India, Cathay, and Manzi (southern China), as places of plenitude. Marco Polo’s *Divisament* repeatedly emphasizes oriental abundance in grain, game, birds, and fish. The people of Ergiuul (Erji’ul, now Wuwei), he says, have abundant corn and pheasants as large as peacocks, “twice as large as those of our country.”⁵¹ In Acbalec in Manzi (Aq-baliq-i-Manzi, now Hanzhong) so much ginger grows that locals maintain a profitable trade, and “they have wheat and rice and other corn in great plenty and very cheap, and it is a land very fruitful of all good things.”⁵² The people of Amu (probably Annam, now in North Vietnam) are blessed with abundant livestock, including plentiful good horses that they trade with, and “great abundance of buffaloes and of oxen and of cows, because it is too good a place and one of good pasture. They have great abundance of all things for life.”⁵³ The region around Ciugiu (Suqian) has a little of everything, including “beautiful fields and they have great abundance of wheat and of all grains.”⁵⁴ The city of Cauyu (Kao-yu) is similarly fortunate, having “great abundance of things of life. They have fish beyond measure. They have chase and hunting of beasts and of birds in vast quantities.”⁵⁵

To an extent, the focus on fertility was based on actual conditions—particularly in southern China, which was significantly more fertile

and productive than northern China.⁵⁶ Yet the emphasis on plenitude contrasts with some reports of later western travelers to Asia who found the meagerness of local diets remarkable. Adriano de las Cortes in the mid-seventeenth century commented that the ration of a Chinese person was “a small bowl of rice and water without salt,” and a century or so later Father du Halde, a collector of contemporary travel records, wrote that a Chinese worker, following an arduous day in the paddy fields, “would think himself lucky to find rice, cooked herbs, with a little tea” as his evening meal.⁵⁷ The abundance of rice was not in question—indeed, de las Cortes was among those who commented with amazement on the three annual harvests of rice in the region of Canton (Guangdong)—but the lack of meat or dietary variety struck early modern western observers.⁵⁸ Perhaps Polo’s impression of plentiful game and poultry derives from observing the diet of the Mongolian governors with whom he mostly mingled rather than the Chinese laborers who attracted little of his attention. Moreover, his sweeping statements on the abundance of eastern regions tapped into well-established European conventions of the “Indies.” *The Letter of Prester John* comments on the kingdom’s vast size and exotic zoological population, makes biblical allusions to its fertility—“[o]ur land flows with honey and abounds with milk,”—and speaks of its valuable pepper production and the miraculous shoals of tasty fish on the shores of its sandy “sea.”⁵⁹ The theme also goes much further back; in the first or second decade CE, Strabo, citing Megasthenes and Erastosthenes, spoke of the great fertility of “India” with its twice-yearly harvests of fruit and grain, excellent rainfall, abundant fruits, and wonderful trees that produce everything from “wool” (cotton) and “Serica” (silk thread) to a fermentable honey that intoxicates those who eat it raw.⁶⁰ In his *Chorography* (c. 43–44 CE) Pomponius Mela says of “India” that it is highly fertile, teems with different kinds of people and animals, possesses ants the size of dogs guarding gold mines, has monstrous snakes that give even an elephant pause, and “is so rich in some places and has such productive soil that in this country honey drips from the leaves.”⁶¹

Odoric’s *Relatio* also repeatedly describes the abundant or unusual foods of eastern lands. In India he is impressed by the production of pepper and quantity of ginger, and in Java by the abundance of “camphor, cubebs, cardamoms, nutmegs, and many other precious spices.”⁶² In “Panten” (unidentified) are trees that produce flour, honey, or wine.⁶³ The kingdom of Zampa or Champa (roughly central and southern Vietnam) has “great store of victuals and all good things” and fish in such numbers that “at the time of their coming the sea seems to consist of nothing else but fish,” which throw themselves on the beach for easy collection.⁶⁴ Mandeville echoes his description

of each of these places.⁶⁵ The cities of Manzi in Odoric's account make up a kind of land of Cockaigne where the most plenteous provisions could be procured cheaply, enabling a life of ease:

In this land are great quantities of bread, wine, meat, fish, rice, and of all manner of foods used by humanity in the world. ... One can buy three hundred pounds of fresh ginger for less than a groat. Here also the geese are bigger and finer and cheaper than anywhere in the world. ... And these geese are extremely fat, yet you may have one of them well dressed and seasoned for less than a groat. And as it is with geese, so also it is with the ducks and fowls. ... This place is one of the best in the world as regards its provision for the body of man.⁶⁶

Around the region of the T sien Tang River Odoric marvels at cormorants trained to fish for their human masters.⁶⁷ Cansay (Hangzhou) astonishes Odoric for its size and populousness, "yet there is always there great plenty of bread, pork, rice and wine."⁶⁸ Again, Mandeville echoes Odoric.⁶⁹ Most foods meriting comment are remarkable for their size and quantity rather than for being marvelous in kind, though Odoric and Mandeville remark on a Cantonese fashion for eating huge snakes and the wonderful melon that bursts when ripe: "a little beast is found inside like a small lamb, so that they have both melons and meat."⁷⁰

Jordan's India abounds in extraordinary fruits such as the *Chaqui* (jackfruit) "of such size that one is enough for five persons," the *Bloqui*, which is just as large and sweet, the *Aniba* (mango), "a fruit so sweet and delicious as it is impossible to utter in words," and the wonderful *Nargil* (coconut) with its tender kernel, milk to rival the milk of almonds that may be fermented to produce "wine" and palm sugar, and husks (coir) producing twine for boat construction.⁷¹ John of Monte Corvino recommended to his Franciscan superiors that "none save thoroughly reliable men should be sent [as missionaries], for these countries are most beautiful, abounding in spices and precious stones, though they have few of our fruits."⁷² A related letter speaks of Indian "trees which produce fruit continually, so that on them you find fruit in every stage up to perfect ripeness at one time," "aromatic spices," sugar-producing trees, pepper and ginger, nuts and cinnamon.⁷³ Hetoum of Armenia comments on the excellent spices of the islands and the abundance of rice, millet, milk, butter, dates, and other plentiful fruits of the western part of "India" (in the region of Ormuz), despite the lack of wheat or barley.⁷⁴ The "Book of the Estate of the Great Caan" claims Cathay is short of meat because of the large population but plentiful in wheat, rice, barley, and other grains, with two rice harvests a year, and in fruits and sugar; it also describes trees that produce sweet milky liquid and other fruits with grains from which pasta and bread can be made.⁷⁵ Like Odoric and Mandeville, Marignolli finds the production of pepper in southern India worthy of

detailed comment, remarking on the kinds of vines on which they grow and the method by which they are dried and harvested. Marignolli adds that Manzi possesses “great plenty of everything, including fruits quite unknown in our Latin countries.” Seyllan (Ceylon/Sri Lanka), location of “Adam’s garden,” is prolific in fruit including the multipurpose coconut, delicious mango, and again the gigantic jackfruit “as big as a lamb, or a child of three years old,” though lacking familiar pears, apples, figs, grapes, melons, and cucumbers.⁷⁶ Poggio’s account of Niccolò’s travels makes frequent mention of Indian, southeast Asian, and Chinese spices and fruits, familiar and exotic, including ginger, cinnamon, pepper, nutmeg, mace, bananas, coconuts, pineapples, oranges, small green melons, jackfruit, mangoes, and all manner of strange fruits.⁷⁷

Several authors, especially fictional travelers, connect salubrious food and drink with the Earthly Paradise located in the distant East. Mandeville, working from *The Letter of Prester John*, claims to have drunk from a fountain of youth near the city of Polombe (Quilon, now Kollam) that can cure all ills. The author says its source is Paradise, that he has drunk of its sweet waters and ever since has felt well, and expects to feel well until his time comes to die.⁷⁸ Witte, drawing close to the Earthly Paradise, spies an island “full of beautiful trees, with fruits and other kinds of vegetation, and adorned with flowers, and replete with a great many sweetly singing birds.”⁷⁹ Marignolli similarly claims the existence of an Earthly Paradise, “surrounded by the Ocean Sea, in the regions of the Orient on the other side of Columbine India, and over against the mountain of Seyllan.” Among its fertile delights is a marvelous fountain that waters the “trees that produce the best of fruits; wondrous fair are they to look upon, fragrant and delicious for the food of man.”⁸⁰ The trees of Paradise possess medicinal qualities and beautiful fragrance, like those of neighboring “India” that fruit every month.⁸¹

Not every description of south, southeast, and east Asian foodways celebrates luscious fecundity. Despite his evocation of a fertile East, Marco Polo is disturbed that the people of Quinsai (Hangzhou) in Manzi do not balk at eating “all flesh both of dogs and of other brute beasts and other animals which for nothing in the world would any Christian here eat.”⁸² This sounds something like the modern western view of the Chinese as unnervingly omnivorous. Polo comments dispassionately of the people of Maabar in southern India (on the Coromandel Coast) that they worship the ox and will not kill it in order to eat it,⁸³ but “Menentillus” relates more disdainful views of Indian eating habits: “for their daily food they use rice and a little milk; and they eat grossly like pigs, to wit, with the whole hand or fist, and without a spoon. In fact, when at their food they do look

more like pigs than men.”⁸⁴ Niccolò also recoils at some eastern habits, such as Burmese eating giant snakes or huge red ants. The inhabitants of “Susinaria” (unidentified) and Malabar in southern India are serpent- (or lizard-) eaters, too. Yet to Niccolò, the people of Borneo and Java possess the most disgusting culinary habits, eating mice, dogs, cats, and all other kinds of unclean animals in a way reminiscent of earlier accounts of Mongolians. Their vile foods are in keeping with their general depravity, according to this work, including cruelty and indifference toward murder and random violence. As in Tartar narratives, this is reminiscent of the conventional image of the barbarian. Such details, however, do little to disturb the overwhelming impression of oriental plenty.⁸⁵

Ken Albala describes the European Renaissance belief that environmental factors such as the relative fertility of an area had great influence on the character of local peoples. Mountainous marginal land produces hardy, independent types; seafaring peoples are outgoing and adventurous; and “[a] region that produces an abundance of food with little effort naturally spawns a lazy populace.”⁸⁶ In contrast, medieval travel writers do not make a connection between fertile lands and native indolence; that seems to be a slightly later oriental stereotype. The theme of eastern abundance in medieval travel writing may have served some pragmatic knowledge needs, providing merchants with a guide to the kinds of goods one might find abroad and possibilities for trade. However, this explanation only goes so far. Trading interests could account for references to spice production and perhaps coconuts, but not for passages on highly perishable game, birds, fish, milk, and soft fruit.⁸⁷

Most of the works commenting on eastern abundance were produced either entirely by or in association with writers who had not traveled to the places described. *The Letter of Prester John* and the books of Hetoum, Mandeville, and Witte were all produced by authors who had probably not traveled beyond the Middle East if at all, while those of Marco Polo, Odoric, and Niccolò were coproductions by actual travelers and their collaborators. Marignolli’s book seems to have been a firsthand account by a bona fide traveler but is marked by geographical vagueness and a tendency to conflate biblical and Asian geography. Jordan was also the author of his own account of Indian customs but probably did not go east of Quilon. Friar Menentillus’s letter and the “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan” are of uncertain origin or authorship (see Chapter 2). Most medieval evocations of a marvelously fertile East come, therefore, from unreliable witnesses, but they also include the most widely copied and circulated works (*The Letter of Prester John*, Marco Polo, Odoric, Hetoum, and Mandeville). Of all the authors of accounts of India and China, the

missionaries John of Monte Corvino, Peregrine of Castello, and Andrew of Perugia fall best into the category of “reliable witnesses,” but their letters are short and uninformative and only Monte Corvino mentions oriental abundance. Carpini says Cathay is “very rich in corn, wine, gold and silk and in all the things which usually support human life,”⁸⁸ but though relatively reliable he is not, this time, as a witness, as he did not travel as far as China.

We should note, too, that there was much that western observers *left out* of their descriptions of eastern foods and foodways. They paid little if any attention to food as cuisine—complicated recipes, ingenious combinations of ingredients, or specialist methods of preparation. This is somewhat surprising given the attention paid to gastronomy in Indian and Chinese cookery and contemporary European aristocratic obsession with elaborate feasting.⁸⁹ Although travelers to China commented on the splendor of Yuan-era courtly feasts (as will be noted in Chapter 7), little was said about the actual food served. Nor do they remark on Chinese, Indian, or other philosophies on the importance of food in medical theories of physical health (such as principles of *yin-yang balance*) or moral perspectives on the virtues of temperance. Plenitude was the dominant theme.

The point is not that travelers would not have encountered exotic fruits, fragrant spices, and other marvelous foodstuffs in India, China, and southeast Asia; surely they regularly did. Yet they rarely choose to comment on scarcity or poverty, which they must have witnessed also, or on sophisticated cuisine or dietary philosophies. The image of the Indies as a cornucopia of delicious foodstuffs overwhelmed all other considerations. It was a necessary component of any significant account of the region.⁹⁰ Its narrative necessity was perhaps particularly pronounced in the context of the early and mid-fourteenth-century land shortage and hunger when most of these works were produced or in circulation. Such conditions pressed forcefully on early fourteenth-century imaginations and provide one explanation for the popularity of the imagery of fertile profusion. Northern European readers who acquired copies of Marco Polo’s or Odoric’s books would have been confronted by hunger in their streets and villages even if they did not experience it themselves. Even for those in southern Europe less troubled by the prospect of famine, descriptions of grains, game, poultry, spices, and juicy fruits in ample quantities must have had a powerful allure that is hard to imagine in our own days of rapid global food transportation when peaches, strawberries, and pineapples are perpetually available to the western consumer.

Yet the symbolic role of fruit in European discourse was not straightforward. Late medieval medical texts were beginning to issue

dire warnings about the hazards of fruit ingestion and the havoc wrought upon the digestive system and general health. Ken Albala speaks of early Renaissance dietary “fear of fruits bordering on the pathological,” in particular “the persistent [medical] tirades against melons, decade after decade.” “Nothing in the Renaissance mind could be considered more delicious *and dangerous* than a sweet, ripe, juicy melon. Stories circulated about people who died eating melons, with kings and emperors on the death list.” It was the cold wetness of the melon coming in contact with the digestive fires of the stomach, followed by the putrefaction of the fruit matter and passage of corrupt juices into the veins, that was so feared. Peaches, squash, cucumbers, and eggplants had the same pernicious effects.⁹¹ Such forbidden fruit was at once an object of desire and a dangerous temptation. Yet late medieval travelers do not seem to have been troubled by the potential dangers of fruit in the way that medical authors often were. Paul Freedman, discussing late medieval imagery surrounding spices that may be comparable, notes a shift away from their connection with danger to an association with plenitude in the later medieval period as travelers’ experiences of eastern places produced accounts of abundance rather than hazards.⁹²

Cathay and Manzi are presented as worlds without famine, just as the kingdom of Prester John includes no paupers among its people.⁹³ Marco Polo’s Khubilai Khân is a benevolent distributor of alms who offers tax relief to anyone experiencing hardship and keeps good storehouses of produce to dole out in times of need.⁹⁴ The “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan” similarly remarks on the compassion of the emperor, who provided stores of wheat, rice, and all kinds of grain for his subjects in need. He is also munificent in giving alms to the poor and infirm and fair in taxation.⁹⁵ These accounts accord with modern historians’ descriptions of Khubilai’s welfare provisions in China, based on Chinese sources.⁹⁶ The copy of the “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan” in the *Livre des Merveilles* illustrates this scene, the version of Polo’s book in Oxford, Bodley 264 shows the Great Khân distributing bread to the needy, and the copy in BL MS Royal 19 D.1 shows a white-skinned Khân with blond hair and beard giving instructions to a blond servant holding a basket of bread, while another fair man distributes the bread to three “poor men.”⁹⁷

Organized provision for the hungry poor was familiar to late medieval Europeans. Civic authorities from the ancient Greeks through to the eighteenth century attempted such provision to stabilize economies and ward off food riots.⁹⁸ At the time of the Great Famine municipal and royal authorities in northern Europe made concerted efforts to stave off the worst through legislation to ensure supplies of grain, game, and fish and prevent profiteering.⁹⁹ Such

measures were rather more sophisticated responses to subsistence crisis than the literary model of the kindly Khân doling out grain or bread as portrayed by travel writers and manuscript illuminators, but there are similarities nonetheless. The image of a benevolent Khân offers an ideal of leadership at a time when kings and councils were attempting to devise creative solutions to the hunger afflicting their realms and cities. Readers may have been familiar with legislated provisions against famine, but their travel books offered a simplified and perfected model of royal charity. This supplied an image of definitive similarity for European readers in their increasingly complex vision of a world beyond familiar borders.

Medieval and early Renaissance minds connected delectable foods, sensual pleasure, the far East as a physical location to which one might actually travel, and the idea of Paradise as an at-once real and holy place when they wrote or read about the easternmost reaches of the world. The Earthly Paradise of the East and the other world of Heaven had fruits and spices in common. Peter Idley, a fifteenth-century English author of a book of spiritual advice, described Heaven as a place “With all maner fruits and of divers spicerie / Delicious in taast and of suche odoure.”¹⁰⁰ Christopher Woolgar reminds us that medieval Christians were familiar with depictions of heaven, hell, and purgatory as fully material, fully sensual locations.¹⁰¹ Readers of such literature, when they turned to contemporary travel writing, must have been alert to the parallels between such evocations of eternal destinations and places to be found in the world over the eastern horizon. The portrayal of the eastern realms of Cathay, Manzi, and India as places of bounty and munificence gave European readers a fabulous realm upon which to project their desires for epicurean pleasures, and indeed nutritional sustenance, during a period when much of the populace was enduring meager rations. If eating is an expression of intimate acceptance, then medieval readers hungered for this delectable East and happily swallowed it.

Anthropophagi at the World's Margins

The allegation of humans eating fellow humans has long provided an ideological weapon for groups seeking to entrench a position of superiority and civilization. It is a familiar theme to medievalists, who have begun to chart in increasing detail the uses of “cannibalistic” imagery in Christian constructions of the peoples most feared and placed outside the boundaries of the *societas christiana*. Human-eating was an accusation frequently leveled at Saracens. In Heather Blurton’s view, “Far more than any other group in the European Middle Ages, it is the Muslim—or rather the Saracen of imaginative literature—who is

accused of cannibalism.”¹⁰² Yet while the broad theme of human-eating is found through western history, it is not unchanging. Anthropophagy and cannibalism have their own histories. Since William Arens threw his *The Man-Eating Myth* (1979) like a hand grenade into anthropological scholarship, ethnographers and historians have been embroiled in debates over whether or to what extent cannibalism has ever existed as a customary practice in the indigenous populations that have been most regularly found guilty of it, such as indigenous Brazilians, Maori, and Fijians.¹⁰³ In turning to the theme of anthropophagy in medieval travel writing on Asian contexts, my chief concern is not the burden of trying to establish the truth of the allegations.¹⁰⁴ What one can do, by tracing repetition of themes and images, is show how hackneyed most of the accusations were and how dependent on long literary lineages. By tracing the changing pattern of anthropophagy accusations across texts and time we can try to answer the questions of how and why the allegations were leveled at certain groups. “Anthropophagy” (for the practice) and “anthropophagi” (for the alleged practitioners) are the terms preferred here as they can encompass both human and non-human consumption of human flesh, unlike “cannibal,” which refers specifically to the former and did not appear until 1492, in Christopher Columbus’s journal.¹⁰⁵

Some medieval literary anthropophagi were clearly human and others more peripherally so as hybrid creatures such as giants whose humanity was, if not entirely in doubt, at least open to question.¹⁰⁶ If we borrow from Gananath Obeyesekere’s term “cannibal talk” for the vocabulary, topoi, and narratives of cannibalism, we may speak of “anthropophagi talk.” The two kinds of “talk” have much in common—this is not surprising, given that discourses of cannibalism partly draw on much older representations of anthropophagy—but they are not exactly identical. The common topoi of anthropophagi discourse are: (1) human-eating as an element of unclean habits where it is merely the most disgusting of a long list of abject eating practices; (2) intrafamilial consumption, especially of the father by his surviving family; (3) the claim that anthropophagic people have the heads or faces of dogs (that is, they are *Cynocephali* or dogheads) or belong to other monstrous species such as giants or Cyclopes; (4) human-eating to avoid starvation; (5) consumption of the enemy as an aspect of warfare or after battle, and of slaves, prisoners, or captives. Such themes are recurrent in medieval literature and histories, including crusade narratives, and are not always neatly separated. The devouring, belligerent Saracens of Old French chansons de geste, as Blurton shows, often possessed monstrous morphologies (especially gigantism and cynocephalism), thus combining our third and fifth

categories.¹⁰⁷ The motifs appear in twelve of our accounts of travel: nine relating to actual journeys (Carpini, *The Tartar Relation*, Simon of St. Quentin, Rubruck, Marco Polo, Ricold, Jordan, Odoric, and Niccolò) and three fictional accounts (*The Letter of Prester John*, Mandeville, and Witte) and one other (Hetoum). It is also a theme of chronicle accounts of the Mongols already in circulation. Mongols, Tibetans, the inhabitants of the islands of Andaman, Nicobar, Lamori (off northern Sumatra?), and northern Sumatra itself, and certain monstrous creatures are those alleged to be anthropophagous. Marco Polo adds two unusual examples: the inhabitants of Cipangu (Japan), under certain conditions, and of the Chinese kingdom of Fugiu (Fuzhou).

Western allegations of Mongol practice told of warfare-, unclean-, and starvation-anthropophagy, sometimes blending the three in a single passage.¹⁰⁸ An early reference comes in the *Chronicle of Novgorod* for the year 1238, telling how the “accursed, raw-eating Tartars ... began to ride through our streets, writing down the Christian houses; because for our sins God has brought wild beasts out of the desert to eat the flesh of the strong, and to drink the blood of Boyars.”¹⁰⁹ Gregory Guzman discusses Carpini’s, C. de Bridia’s, and Simon of St. Quentin’s descriptions alongside reports from Archbishop Peter of Russia and Matthew Paris.¹¹⁰ Peter’s letter, written between 1241 and 1244, states the Mongols would eat “horses, dogs, and other abominable meats” and when necessary “even human flesh, not raw however, but cooked.”¹¹¹ Carpini’s and *The Tartar Relation*’s descriptions have already been cited in the discussion of Mongolian scarcity and seem very close to the archbishop’s. Simon of St. Quentin (through Vincent of Beauvais) speaks twice of Mongol practices of human-eating as part of their military tactics, “sometimes out of necessity, sometimes out of pleasure, and sometimes in order to strike fear and terror in the people who will hear of it” or to avenge betrayal through “avidly” drinking blood like “infernal bloodsuckers.”¹¹²

Matthew Paris’s narrative from 1240 calls Tartars “that detestable race of Satan,” running over the face of the earth “like locusts,” “thirsting after and drinking blood, and tearing and devouring the flesh of dogs and human beings.”¹¹³ A letter with a similar tone ascribed to the Landgrave of Thuringia in 1242 tells how this dreadful race do not so much eat men as devour them, eat frogs and snakes, and in general show no discrimination in their food.¹¹⁴ The most lurid passage is quoted from a letter of Yvo of Narbonne in 1243, in which the “dogeaters or filtheaters [*cenofaris aliisque lotofagis*]” eat the corpses of those killed in battle “like bread [*quasi pane*],” though even hungry vultures would disdain them. Worse, they give old or deformed women to the anthropophagi (*antropofagis*) to eat as their

daily food but keep the beautiful virgins to be raped until they suffocate despite their great cries and protestations. Their nipples are cut off and kept as dainty treats for the Mongol chiefs and their bodies make for a joyful feast.¹¹⁵ The autograph manuscript of the *Chronica maiora* includes a vivid illustration from Matthew's own hand, depicting grotesque Tartars roasting, butchering, and feasting on human victims.¹¹⁶ Carpini's view, then, is certainly the mildest of these, but he shares with authors of the same period the convention of linking Mongol hardness and barbarity with vile eating habits.

As Guzman argues, the possibility that Latin authors were simply describing Mongolian practice is remote. He points out that Chinese, Tibetan, and Muslim sources do not make the same allegations "though they had more direct and longer-lasting contact with the Mongols than the Europeans did."¹¹⁷ Moreover, much of the imagery already had a long lineage in European literature. Most relevant are the numerous and widely circulating legends of the unclean, bloodthirsty, ferocious, and anthropophagic peoples of Gog and Magog, who were prophesied to burst forth from their northern stronghold at the time of the coming of the Antichrist in versions of the Alexander legend and offshoots such as Pseudo-Methodius's *Revelations* of the late seventh century.¹¹⁸ From the latter, "they ate in cups every kind of defiled and filthy thing, that is, dogs, rats, serpents, dead men's flesh, aborted and unformed bodies, and those which are not yet formed in the womb in their essential features."¹¹⁹ The *Revelations* are found in several late medieval manuscripts containing works of travel literature, including *The Letter of Prester John*.¹²⁰ Versions of the perennially influential *Letter* include the peoples of Gog and Magog who eat human flesh, are not afraid to die, and will even eat the bodies of their dead parents raw.¹²¹ A number of thirteenth-century authors explicitly equated the Mongols with the peoples of Gog and Magog.¹²²

Mongolian survival anthropophagy is connected to the depiction of filthy eating habits, but it does not seem to derive directly from analogues in the Alexander and apocalyptic literature. Eating human flesh to stave off starvation was a well-known theme in medieval texts, but it is often *Europeans* who do the deed. Chroniclers of the First Crusade including the anonymous author of *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, Fulcher of Chartres, Raymond d'Aguiliers, and Guibert of Nogent, along with several other contemporary or near contemporary witnesses and twelfth-century vernacular verse accounts, tell of how in 1098 at the battle of Ma'arra an-Numan in northern Syria, tough Frankish crusaders ate Saracen corpses to avoid starvation.¹²³ A curious variant of this theme is in the English romance *Richard Coer de Lyon*. Falling ill en route to the Holy Land,

this fictional Richard the Lionheart (at first unknowingly) devours the flesh of a young, fat Saracen his followers prepare for him to satisfy his craving for pork. When the trick is revealed Richard laughs heartily, attempts to intimidate Saladin's ambassadors by serving up the heads of pagan princes, happily eats one himself, and sends the ambassadors off with the message that he does not intend to return home until all Saracens in Saladin's lands have been gobbled up.¹²⁴ Survival anthropophagy is likewise a common theme in chronicle accounts of European famines. Julia Marvin traces tales of human-eating in two English chronicles to the siege of Samaria in 2 Kings 6, in which the people are so hungry they pay high prices even for such desperate foodstuffs as a donkey's head and pigeon droppings and one woman is tricked by another into cooking and eating her own son. Thus, while eating unclean things and human flesh instead of dying of starvation is often portrayed as a horrific act by medieval authors, it may serve to police the boundaries of identity formation rather than serve as a marker of Otherness. Even Europeans could be susceptible, under conditions of extreme duress.¹²⁵

Textual precursors for some further aspects of Mongol anthropophagy are harder to trace, but that might be remedied by a more exhaustive study. For example, Guzman's excellent survey of the likely sources for the Mongolian passages does not turn up a source for Yvo of Narbonne's highly colored account of Mongol rape and consumption of captive women, yet it is reminiscent of Jerome's *Against Jovinian*. According to Jerome, the Atticoti, a British tribe he met in Gaul, enjoyed eating "the buttocks of the shepherds and the breasts of their women."¹²⁶ Further searching may produce sources for Mongol judicial anthropophagy found in Hetoum of Armenia and Ricold de Monte Croce.¹²⁷ The latter places responsibility for the act on Tartar women in keeping with his general account of the women's active part in Mongol campaigns (see Chapter 5).

Western authors may also have been responding to Mongols' own uses of anthropophagic imagery in their histories and literature, notably *The Secret History of the Mongols*. One passage on four ferocious Mongol warriors tells how "On the day of killing / They eat human flesh, those ones; / On the day of battles / They make human flesh / Their provisions, those ones. Loosed from their iron chains—which had surely restrained them!—they are now full of joy and are approaching thus, slavering at the mouth." Chinggis's brother Joci Qasar "is three fathoms high, / And he dines on three-year old cattle; / Wearing a three-layered armour, / He is pulled along in his cart by three bulls. When he swallows a man complete with quiver, / It does not get stuck in his throat. / When he gulps down a whole man, It does not fill his stomach." The Kitat troops are said in *The Secret*

History (seemingly echoed by Carpini) to have turned to eating humans following near destruction by Chinggis's forces.¹²⁸ In Mongol mythology of the founding of their empire, anthropophagy combines with other forms of hyperbole not meant to be taken literally. It is used metaphorically to convey the warriors' immense power and ferocity.

In a different vein, portrayals of Tibetans draw on the theme of intrafamilial consumption. Carpini, Rubruck, Odoric, and Mandeville remark on their ritual anthropophagy, specifically the consumption of the dead father and use of his head as a cup, though of the four only Odoric may have gone near Tibet.¹²⁹ Intrafamilial anthropophagy is a common theme of ancient Greek myth—Cronos consumes his children; Tantalus stews his son and offers him to the gods; Procne, learning of her husband's rape of her sister Philomela, kills her son and cooks and serves him to his father¹³⁰—but medieval travelers' accounts of Tibetans go back to book 4 of Herodotus's *Histories*, on the Issedonian people of the remote north:

Some knowledge of the customs of the Issedones has come through to us: when a man's father dies, his kinsmen bring sheep to his house as a sacrificial offering; the sheep and the body of the dead man are cut into joints and sliced up, and the two sorts of meat, mixed together, are served and eaten. The dead man's head, however, they gild, after stripping off the hair and cleaning out the inside, and then preserve it as a sort of sacred image, to which they offer sacrifice.¹³¹

Herodotus's descriptions of the Massagetae, Callatai, and Padaioi repeat the imagery.¹³² Examining skeletal remains from Aymyrlyg in southern Siberia, archaeologists E. M. Murphy and J. P. Mallory suggest that the ritual dismemberment and disarticulation of corpses may have been misinterpreted by ancient observers as preparations for eating and that thus the mythical anthropophagy of Scythian and other eastern peoples passed into written record.¹³³ Strabo, writing in Greek at the end of the first century BCE, also noted Scythians as human-eaters who sacrificed strangers, ate their flesh, and used their skulls as cups.¹³⁴ While later medieval Latin authors did not read Herodotus or Strabo directly, the theme was passed down through canonical literature. The description of Issedones is followed closely by Mela in his *Chorography* (c. 43–44 CE), who says some inhabitants of India “kill their parents (when they are on the verge of decline) like sacrificial animals before the parents decline from age and illness, and it is both morally right and absolutely pious to feast on the viscera of slain parents.”¹³⁵ The parent-eating Issedones appear again in Solinus¹³⁶ and on the Hereford *Mappa Mundi* of c. 1300: “The Essedones of Scythia live here, whose custom is to accompany their parents' funerals with songs and having assembled a group of friends, to tear into their parents' bodies with their teeth and to make a

solemn feast of animal meat mixed with human flesh, believing it more honourable to be consumed by each other than by worms.” The map also cites Solinus in calling the savage races shut up by Alexander “Essedones,” who feed on human flesh and blood and will erupt from their stronghold at the coming of the Antichrist.¹³⁷

Herodotus’s Issedonians were thus repeatedly reincarnated and repatriated in text. Marco Polo placed familial anthropophagy in the kingdom of Dagroian, on Java the Less (northern Sumatra). There “very savage” idolaters have the evil custom of killing invalids to be cooked and eaten by relatives:

Moreover I tell you that they eat all the marrows which are inside the bones. And they do this because they do not wish any atom of him to remain. For they say that if there were to remain there any substance that the substance would make worms, and the [worms] would die at for want of food. And they say that from the death of these worms the soul of the dead would have great harm from it and sin, and therefore they eat him all. And they have eaten him they take the bones and put them in a beautiful casket, and then carry them and hang them in great caves of the mountains in such a place that no beast or other evil thing could touch them.¹³⁸

Polo finishes with the standard anthropophagic trope of prisoner consumption. Odoric locates intrafamilial consumption in Dondin (probably Andaman Island), finding it the most disgusting of all anthropophagy. Mandeville copied him. The very name of the island, Odoric claims, signifies “Unclean,” and the inhabitants are “bad men ... who eat raw flesh and every other kind of filth. They also have among them a vile custom; for the father will eat the son, the son the father, the wife will eat the husband, or the husband the wife.” Odoric rebukes them for this practice as not even a dog would do this to its own kind: “[W]hy should you do thus, who seem to be men endowed with reason?” Their answer has ancient echoes: the deceased’s flesh would otherwise be devoured by worms, to the great detriment of his soul.¹³⁹



Figure 2. Illumination from *The Book of Wonders* (*Il Milione* or *The Travels of Marco Polo*), by Marco Polo (1254–1324). Scenes of anthropophagy and idolatry in Sumatra, 1410–12. Bibliothèque nationale de France, fifteenth century. Photo credit: Universal Images Group / Art Resource, NY.

Andaman, Lamori, and Sumatra in its northern parts are indeed among the regular locations of alleged human-eating along with Mongolia and Tibet. Marco Polo writes of “Ferlec” on Sumatra, where the inland mountain people live like beasts and “eat flesh of men, and all other flesh both good and bad.”¹⁴⁰ Jordan says of “Javans” (most likely northern Sumatrans) that “they delight to eat white and fat men when they can get them.”¹⁴¹ Niccolò similarly denounces northern Sumatrans and Andamanians who eat the flesh of unfortunate travelers forced ashore by bad weather, while the people of Batech (Batak) in northern Sumatra dine on the flesh of the neighboring islanders with whom they are always at war and keep the skulls to use as currency.¹⁴² This trope of what we might call stranger-anthropophagy has ancient roots, glimpsed in Homer’s story of the Cyclops devouring Odysseus’s companions and Strabo’s claim that the Axine Sea was not navigable because of its wintry storms and the ferocity of the tribes living around it, “particularly the Scythians, in that they sacrificed strangers, ate their flesh, and used their skulls as drinking cups.”¹⁴³

Devouring children or adolescents is a theme common to the discourses of anthropophagy and cannibalism. Odoric ascribes the practice to the people of Lamori, who are depicted as alien in several respects: they go naked because of excessive heat, and they lack monogamous marriage or any concept of private property. Their anthropophagy is all the more wicked because not prompted by want

or starvation; moreover, the inhabitants dine on specially imported and butchered children.¹⁴⁴ Mandeville repeats Odoric's description but adds that the children's flesh is said to be the best and sweetest in the world.¹⁴⁵

Perhaps the oldest convention of "anthrophagi talk," however, is the human-eater as a monster. This is at least 2,500 years old, found in the Cyclops of Homer's *Odyssey*, the ferocious hairy barking man who eats a woman sent to tempt him in the *Alexander Romance*, the "Donestre" of the *Wonders of the East*—indeed, in too many figures to mention.¹⁴⁶ Marco Polo writes of the inhabitants of Andaman Island who "have no king" and "are idolaters and are like wild beasts" and "have the crown of the head like a dog and teeth and eyes like dogs; for I tell you that they are just like the heads of great mastiff dogs ... they are very cruel people, they eat men, all those that they can catch, provided they are not of their people." The habit is not brought about through necessity, as they have spices, milk, flesh, and fruit.¹⁴⁷ Odoric relocates the dogheaded people to Nicobar where they worship the ox as their god and go naked except for a small cloth, and if they happen to take in battle anyone who cannot have himself ransomed they eat him at once. However, they also have abundant precious gems and a system of justice ruled over by their king: their anthropophagy is not forced by poverty or explained by lack of reason.¹⁴⁸ Mandeville describes ghastly giants beyond the Valley Perilous who lack all signs of civility (clothes, bread, housing) and like nothing better than to eat human flesh, wading into the sea to scoop unwary sailors out and devour them.¹⁴⁹ Johannes Witte de Hese makes anthropophagy one characteristic of the underwater "One-Eyes" living somewhere between Ethiopia and Middle India.¹⁵⁰

Marco Polo's six groups of anthropophagi are especially diverse. While his Andaman Island dogheads and Dagroian father-consumers derive from ancient European literary models and his Ferlec islanders are too briefly described to be linked to any specific exemplar, his description of Tibetan and Kashmiri peoples living in Ciandu (Shangdu) as foreign denizens differs from other circulating tales of human-eating. They practice necromancy and devilish arts and eat prisoners condemned to die; "but if he were to die of his own death they never eat him."¹⁵¹ His description of the Cipanguans as consumers of prisoners also appears unique, as no other medieval traveler described Japan. The captor "calls together all his relations and his friends and says, I wish you to come to eat with me at my lodging. And then he makes them kill the man whom he has taken and eats him with his relations. And you understand that he has him cooked. And they hold this human flesh as the best food that they could have."¹⁵² Also anomalous is his section on the people subject to

the Chinese city of Fugiu (Fuzhou), who enjoy good hunting and abundant spices but also eat crude foods and human flesh, provided the deceased has not died a natural death: "But those who are killed with a sword, they eat them all and count them very good flesh. ... They carry lances and swords and are the most cruel men in the world, for I tell you that they go all day killing men and they drink the blood, then they all eat them."¹⁵³ Perhaps Polo's textual analogues in these cases are not with the European tradition but with Chinese legends. While consumption of prisoners is not a noted feature of the European textual tradition on anthropophagy, it frequently appears in Chinese annals of the imperial era.¹⁵⁴

The anthropophagous peoples of the *Divisament* are diverse but share some similar attributes. They are all, in some way, marginal or outsider peoples within the context of the fabulous East. The Great Khân's necromancers at Ciandu are foreigners employed by Khubilai. The people of Cipangu are exotics known of only at secondhand. The mountain-dwelling people of Fugiu are subject both to the city of Fugiu and to the Great Khân. The islands of southeast Asia represented the farthest reaches of the world for Europeans and contained a number of separate anthropophagous populations. The man-eaters of the Sumatran kingdom of Ferlec are also mountain-dwellers whom the traveler has not met, unlike the non-anthropophagous Islamic converts dwelling on the coast. The people of Dagroian are doubly anthropophagous, in ritual consumption of their relatives and in opportunistic devouring of foreigners. They share the latter with Andaman Islanders, who are marginal not only geographically but also somatically, with heads, teeth, and eyes resembling those of dogs.

We could argue that Polo's anthropophagi share their essential marginality with peoples accused of cannibalism in more recent times; in Arens's words, "The existence of man-eating peoples just beyond the pale of civilization is a common ethnographic suggestion."¹⁵⁵ But we can go further. There are varieties of man-eating and in most cases strict cultural rules are said to apply. The magicians of Ciandu and the Fugiuans will only eat the recently killed, while the Dagroians are happy to eat those dead from natural causes. The Andamanians will eat only foreigners; the Dagroians will eat family members. If anthropophagi are alien to the European observer, each human-eating group is also in some way Other to each other; not all are equally to be reviled, and some, such as Carpini's Mongols, exhibit behavior that is not inexplicable given that Europeans when in extremis will do the same. "Others" can sometimes look familiar. One factor all Asian anthropophagi have in common is that they are not "civilized" in the most literal sense of the term: they do not live in cities. The anthropophagi of medieval travel texts are nomads or village-dwellers,

reflecting the ancient European bias toward urban societies, which was of increasing relevance to an urbanizing West.

Conclusion

William Chester Jordan, commenting on the frequency of allusions to anthropophagy in European accounts of extreme famine, considers ways of interpreting them as a literary topos: “To make a famine *real*, narratively speaking, the chronicler had to include cannibalism in the story.”¹⁵⁶ Similarly, medieval travel writers had a range of literary rationales for including anthropophagi among oriental peoples. Given its long literary lineage, some reference was almost essential to fulfilling the requirements of the genre. We may adapt Jordan’s sentence: to make a narrative of far eastern travel *real*, narratively speaking, the travel writer (or his scribe) found it advisable to include anthropophagy in the story. Yet anthropophagic motifs serve ultimately not merely to make exotic peoples seem alien but also, in a sense, to domesticate them. The practices described by the travelers were mostly not novel to educated Europeans. Quite the contrary, they were part of their mental furniture. It was only to be expected that at least some of the inhabitants of lands so distant would eat family members, or unwary captives, or innocent children because that was what had always been said of people far away.

Readers expected, too, that eastern places would be fertile wonderlands of fruit, spices, and abundance, and travelers to India and China devoted plenty of space to this theme. A less predictable vision of the Orient was supplied by those who witnessed the scarcity of foodstuffs on the Mongolian plains. Europeans might have been accustomed to the frequency of famines on their own continent, but these were perceived as temporary interruptions to the norm. Europe may not have been a land of milk and honey for all inhabitants, but at least it could normally be expected to supply *enough*. Having to subsist on mice, lice, water flavored with millet, and stinking old meat was perceived as excessively austere. The Mongol peoples who could do so were confirmed as immoderately tough characters of whom one should be wary and as displaying a fundamental lack of civilization.

Distant eastern contexts varied greatly in their foodways. Although European readers brought familiarity with fertility, luxury, and occasional anthropophagy to their reading of eastern travel narratives, they were also prepared to learn from the experiences of travelers that challenged these traditional images. The level of attention medieval travelers paid to foodstuffs and eating habits in their accounts of distant oriental places should be acknowledged as central to their constructions of Asian peoples and cultures. After all, what could be

more basic than the impulse to swallow or vomit? What could be more revealing than a culture's habits and prohibitions around food?

Ken Albala states that, from the sixteenth century, Europeans became more mistrustful of the food of others. Ioannes Bruyerin Campegius (1560) reviles the Chinese for eating raw meat, snakes, and rice wine, and the Senegalese for eating filthy and nauseating foods.¹⁵⁷ Europeans became increasingly suspicious about foods introduced into their diets from distant lands. They move from the broad-mindedness of the fifteenth century, when authors welcomed foreign foods such as sugar, spinach, celery, rhubarb, cauliflower, lemons, cloves, and nutmeg, to increasing antipathy in the sixteenth century when tomatoes and potatoes were regarded with alimentary xenophobia.¹⁵⁸ Mistrust of food as well as all manner of cultural mores came to dominate European mentalities in tandem with their conquering and colonizing activities in the postmedieval era.

Chapter 5

Femininities

Roxanne L. Euben suggests that travel writing transforms “women’s bodies and behavior into a legend, as on a map, by which entire cultures can be decoded.” She finds this a “remarkably consistent schema governing the representation of women” in both European and Islamic travel literature from Herodotus to the nineteenth century.¹ Women, in this view, become icons or indices of entire cultures—a shortcut for perceiving foreign peoples. Thus, while the detail in travelers’ descriptions of foreign women will vary depending on the cultural context, the principle guiding travelers’ tales of foreign women remains the same.

In this chapter Euben’s statement will be tested by application to descriptions of Mongolian, Chinese, and Indian women in later medieval European travel writing. The primary purpose is to examine what happens when one culture (in this case, Latin Christian and male) turns its gaze to women of an entirely different culture and question what rhetorical purposes femininities played in medieval narratives of eastern travel. How did they support or complicate visions of oriental cultures? Was writing about women an essential ingredient in creating a more satisfying narrative (if we may carry over a metaphor from the previous chapter), or did it add little more than textual seasoning? What brands of femininities did travelers’ accounts leave out, and with what implications? What does foregrounding of particular types and silence on others reveal more broadly about European perceptions of different oriental cultures?

I find that while European perspectives on Asian women were not homogeneous, three dominant stereotypes prevailed. Mongolian women were portrayed as hardworking, unattractive, and powerful. Chinese women, on the other hand, were typically said to be attractive and sexually alluring. Indian women were noteworthy primarily for their exotic qualities, particularly when portrayed as *satis*. These types helped shape European perceptions of the respective cultures: warlike and formidable; enticing and seductive; marvelous and strange. The absence of a “goodwife” type from depictions of any Asian culture,

especially in the case of China where a version of this figure was available to authors had they chosen to use it, may be indicative of the limitations of Euben's model but on the other hand is not surprising given that medieval travelers had little to say about the private lives of contemporary Chinese.

Mongolian Women: "She Vanquished Them All"

Every significant medieval account of travel to Mongolia devotes a good deal of space to the hardworking, active women.² Carpini claims their women make all leather goods—tunics, shoes, leggings—drive and repair carts, load camels, and in all tasks "are very swift and energetic." Mongolian men, he says, "do not make anything at all, with the exception of arrows," their main tasks being to tend flocks, hunt, practice archery, and manage horses. On women's appearance he remarks that although married women wear distinctive clothing and headdresses, he finds it almost impossible to tell unmarried women apart from men. Moreover, "[y]oung girls and women ride and gallop on horseback with agility like the men. We even saw them carrying bows and arrows. Both the men and the women are able to endure long stretches of riding. ... All the women wear breeches and some of them shoot like the men."³ The women are chaste and respectable yet they use foul language; they are often drunk yet do not fight each other with words or blows.⁴

Rubruck observes that Mongol women paint beautiful carts and drive up to thirty of these, tied together, across the countryside; that men and unmarried women are similar in dress and appearance; that women ride astride like men; and that they engage in a wide range of domestic, pastoral, and handiwork duties.⁵ He finds them unattractive: "The women are astonishingly fat. The less nose one has, the more beautiful she is considered; and they disfigure themselves horribly, moreover, by painting their faces."⁶ Meeting Scatatai's wife he had the impression "she had amputated the bridge of her nose so as to be more snub-nosed, for she had no trace of a nose there, and she had smeared that spot and her eyebrows as well with some black ointment, which to us looked thoroughly dreadful." On arriving at Möngke's court he comments that his grownup daughter is "very ugly [*valde turpis*]."⁷ Marco Polo's *Divisament* also describes the active lives of Mongol women, although some versions add stronger praise than found in Carpini or Rubruck. Women do all the buying and selling and all necessary work: "For the men trouble themselves with nothing at all but with hunting and with feats of war and with hawking and falcons." A fourteenth-century Latin version adds that on account of women's hard work "in expense they are not burdensome to their

husbands.”⁸

Ricold of Monte Croce remarks that Mongol women are held in high esteem even to the extent of holding the power to “establish and confirm” the Great Khân (who was appointed by a combination of hereditary rights and election). Their high status honors their role in a long-ago battle in which women were active in defeating the enemy. He notes the respect showed to concubines as well as wives: “they govern the house and lands of their husbands and buy and sell as they please, and they are ferocious and warlike and ride as well as their husbands. They ride into cities armed with bows and arrows like their husbands.”⁹

As images of Mongolian femininity began to take shape in European imaginations, we see certain themes reiterated: hard work, political influence, and warrior functions, while lack of erotic appeal is also either stated directly, as in Rubruck, or implicit: no observer speaks of Mongolian women’s physical attractions. *The Secret History of the Mongols* and other Mongolian sources indicate that there was some basis for the perception that high-ranking women could wield authority and influence. Ho’elün Eke (Chinggis’s mother), Börte (his first wife), Töregene (Ögödei’s wife, later regent), Sorghaghtani Beki (Tolui’s widow), Oghul-Qaimish (Güyük’s widow), Chabi, and Nambi (Khubilai Khân’s wives) were all respected and powerful women in their own society. Some women took part in the Mongol government or ruled as regents in widowhood.¹⁰ Yet recent studies by Mongol specialists indicate women’s position within Mongolian society was ambiguous. On the positive side, adultery by men was punished as strictly as when committed by women, concubines could expect their children to receive a share of their father’s property on his death, and marriages were made by bride-price, not dowry (the former arguably a better indicator of a society’s high valuation of women); on the negative, daughters were excluded from inheritance rights and were treated somewhat like chattels in marriages, which were made by purchase, by capture, or sometimes by inheritance under the system of levirate marriage.¹¹ Medieval European travelers’ perspectives on Mongol women play up their active roles and lack of distinction from men rather than recognizing the ambiguity of their position. I suggest these points of focus are meant to heighten the sense of difference between Mongolian and European societies and to reemphasize their ferocious qualities.

This is best illustrated through European construction of the Tartar woman warrior. That figure, as we saw drawn by Ricold, appears repeatedly in European accounts and has been treated as factual by many modern historians, yet its authenticity is not certain. Joinville’s summary, based on Andrew of Longjumeau’s second ambassadorial

expedition to the Mongols (1249–51), states that “[a]ll the childless women accompany their army to battle; they pay the women a soldier’s wage according to their vigour, in the same way as the men.”¹² Johann Schiltberger’s early fifteenth-century narrative describes a Tartar warrior woman, “Sadurmelick,” who with her army of four thousand women and maidens sought revenge over the man who had killed her husband. When her enemy was brought before her “she ordered him to kneel, and drew her sword, and cut off his head at one blow, and said: ‘Now am I revenged.’”¹³ The copy of Ricold’s *Pérégrinatio* in the Duke of Berry’s *Livre des merveilles* (1413) includes two images of Mongol women warriors. In the first, three women brandish spears and one also wears a visored helmet. Behind them are piled the bleeding bodies of vanquished foes and two men approach in postures of submission. The second miniature depicts three women warriors watching on horseback as a traitor is decapitated. A large pot of boiling water awaits the beheaded corpse.¹⁴ Some versions of *The Book of John Mandeville* take John of Plano Carpini’s description of Mongol women as good archers, via Vincent of Beauvais’s extracts of Carpini in his *Speculum historiale*, and add that the women are “als gude warrayours” as men.¹⁵

The fullest and most vivid tale of a Tartar virago belongs to Marco Polo. Qaidu (c. 1230–c. 1301), great-grandson of Chinggis, had a daughter, “Aigiaruc in Tartarese, which means to say in French Bright Moon.”¹⁶ Princess Aigiaruc was “strong and valiant ... so strong that there was no young man or squire in all the realm who could vanquish her, but I tell you that she vanquished them all.” Determined to remain single, she made a bargain with her father that she would only marry a man who could defeat her in hand-to-hand combat. Many were tested but none could defeat her: “And it was no wonder for she was so well fashioned in all the limbs and was so tall and so big-bodied that it wanted but little that she was a giantess.” In the way of such stories, at last a suitor arrived who appeared to be her match. Dismissing her father’s pleas that she let the contestant win, Aigiaruc triumphed and threw him “on the pavement of the palace.”¹⁷ The warrior daughter of Qaidu is known from eastern sources also, where she is called Qutulun, such as the chronicle of the Persian Rashid al-Din.¹⁸ The story contained in the *Divisament*, however, probably owes much to literary invention. As Jennifer Goodman has noted, the theme of the suitor who must pass a difficult test to win the hand of a beautiful maiden is commonplace in European literature from the tale of Atalanta and Hippomenes in Greek mythology to Puccini’s 1926 opera *Turandot*.¹⁹ Yet Aigiaruc is unusual in her victory. In other such legends the suitor passes the test and wins the maiden; in contrast, Aigiaruc conquers the prince, defends her unmarried state, and

becomes a warrior within her father's army.

A number of distinguished historians have viewed stories of Mongolian warrior women as representative of cultural practice. Morris Rossabi cites Carpini's statement on the girls and women who carried bows and arrows and could ride and shoot as well as men to support his statement that "the women, from early childhood, were offered military training." Yet Carpini does not actually say women fight in battles, despite devoting four chapters in all to Tartar conquests, arms, military tactics, and the best methods of warfare to employ against them. Their chiefs, he says, sometimes set their children, womenfolk, and even dummies on horseback at the rear or the army, some distance from the fighting, but this is expressly to give the impression of a larger force than is actually engaged.²⁰ His references to women riding and shooting might allude to hunting.²¹ Rossabi also tells of Chinggis's daughter leading a final assault on Nishapur (Neyshabur) in Persia, but this is based on a chronicle by the Persian author Juvaini (1226–83), not on a Mongol source.²² When he turns to the story of Aigiaruc/Qutulun, he presents a summary of Polo's tale and, though noting its literary elements, states his belief in its basic authenticity, citing its similarities to Rashid al-Din's version.²³

Herbert Franke remarks that *The Secret History* tells of a woman of the Naiman tribe leading an army but does not supply a reference, and I cannot locate the passage in de Rachewiltz's translation.²⁴ However, there is a revealing scene in which a Naiman official mocks his leader, Tayang, for cowardice: "Had we known that you would have lost courage in this manner, shouldn't we have brought your mother Gürbesü, even though she is only a woman, and given her command of the army?"²⁵ From the context, it is clear the idea of a woman leading an army is so absurd it is mentioned only to ridicule Tayang. *The Secret History* demonstrates that contemporary Mongolian society could be quite anti-feminine and drew clear boundaries between the masculine and feminine. Tayang—portrayed as feeble in his reluctance to lead his forces out in opposition to Chinggis's conquering Mongols—is addressed insultingly by his son as "that woman Tayang [who] speaks such words because he has lost courage. ... That woman Tayang, Who dares not walk further than / A pregnant woman goes to urinate; / Who does not even venture so far as / A wheel-tied calf reaches for its feed." For a man—indeed a military leader—to be called a "woman" was clearly contemptible.²⁶ Apart from a few high-ranking individuals, women in *The Secret History* are little more than objects. Daughters are traded in marriage and women of opposing tribes treated with violence: "ladies and maidens with beautiful cheeks" are seized, raped, and taken as booty, the rest simply enslaved

or slaughtered en masse with their children.²⁷

Let us remember the circumstances of the European texts' construction. Andrew of Longjumeau's experiences were narrated at secondhand; Marco Polo's book was ghostwritten and the story of Aigiaruc may be the work of Rusticello in style if not in basic content; Ricold de Monte Croce was ill-disposed toward the Mongols and, though he would have had dealings with many due to their control of contemporary Persia, did not visit Mongolia himself; the illuminator of the *Livre des merveilles* is known to have let his imagination step in to supply more exciting images than always warranted by the texts they purport to illustrate; and Johann Schiltberger spent several years as a prisoner of the Mongols, which is unlikely to have made him favourably disposed or neutral in his views of them in his book, which was in any case probably produced in collaboration with a scribe.²⁸

Women could, however, have played helpful military roles that fell short of direct combat, as indicated by Carpini.²⁹ Ruy González de Clavijo recounts the story of how Temür defeated his rival Toqtamish by ordering the women of his camp to don men's helmets to deceive the opposing forces camped on the opposite side of the Tesina River. At night, while the women acted as decoys, Temür led his forces upstream to cross at a ford and destroy the enemy camp.³⁰ The Mongol law collection conventionally titled the Great Yassa (Jasagh) provides brief instructions to Chinggis Khân's followers on preparation for military campaigns. Chinggis supposedly "ordered women accompanying the troops to do the work and perform the duties of the men, while the latter were absent fighting."³¹ William of Rubruck makes no mention of Mongolian women warriors and neither does Hetoum of Armenia despite his numerous narrative passages and accounts of battle.

This is an area where a non-specialist must tread warily. Indeed, it is not my place to venture any definitive remarks about the existence or nonexistence of Mongol women warriors, which would require expert examination of contemporary Mongol sources. The foregoing summary is meant only to point out that there appear to be prima facie grounds for skepticism. It may be that fighting women occasionally supplemented Mongol forces and some individuals may have become the subject of legend. James D. Ryan says a few Mongol women fought in Mongol armies, but their greater contribution was in their ability to take over the home camp in the men's absence, and this seems to fit well with the testimony cited earlier.³² Alternatively, the figure of the Mongol woman warrior in European writing might have been mainly literary, formed by observations of women's equestrian and shooting abilities and influenced by Persian and other eastern narratives of Mongolian women fighters. At best, the figure as

portrayed by European travelers was likely an exaggeration of Mongol practice. It is perhaps ironic that our writers do not find similar figures in contemporary Chinese cultures, despite the fact that some Chinese sources (historical, mythological, and literary) portrayed individual Chinese women as heroic warriors or commanders of armies.³³ In the Mongol case, the combination of partial observation with legends already in circulation enabled European travel writers to produce a new variety of virago with great literary force and interest that had a strong lineage in European literature. Her function was to reinforce the image of the Mongols as a people dedicated to warfare and to emphasize the difference between Europeans and Mongols. Yet even in so doing, European writers were making Mongol culture comprehensible within their own literary conventions.

In her article on representations of the woman warrior in medieval chronicles and other literature, Megan McLaughlin argues that before the late eleventh century medieval chroniclers commented dispassionately on this feminine type within European society. By the turn of the thirteenth century, however, more negative views had emerged and fighting women were regarded with curiosity, and some horror, as having transgressed the proper boundaries of their sex.³⁴ It is difficult to know whether female fighters actually had the active role McLaughlin claims for them in early and high medieval cultures or whether their representation in a range of texts owes more to the construction of legend. Moreover, as she discusses, women's military roles may have focused more on strategy than on the wielding of swords and crossbows. David Hay shows that criticism of women warriors was not new (at least in canon law) in the thirteenth century and insists on a distinction between the terms "warrior" and "commander" in assessing women's military contributions.³⁵ Regardless, McLaughlin's central claim for an increasing discomfort with the idea of the woman warrior among authors from around the turn of the thirteenth century is important in considering changing constructions of femininities. As military action and aggression came increasingly to be seen as anomalous and unnatural for women, ideals of feminine behavior, and perceptions of what was *proper* to women's role from a European, Christian perspective, were relocated to a more contained domestic set of constraints. It is notable that some celebrated instances of women playing defensive military roles in late medieval contexts, such as Agnes Dunbar in 1338 and Margaret Paston in 1465, were protecting the home.³⁶

Mongolian women warriors are not treated as unnatural or perverse in late medieval travel writing in the way that European viragos, according to McLaughlin, came to be because they stand outside of the European framework of gender norms. Yet their

distance, their foreignness, from European women is reinscribed even as it is made intelligible. One part of the cultural work performed by the woman warrior in medieval texts is to allude to a past, primitive, or distant culture. The figure received repeated representation in medieval chronicles, legal treatises, and romance literature: Penthesilea and her Amazons, Semiramis, and the biblical Deborah and Judith. Societies said to contain military women, particularly in combat roles rather than as commanders, are often primitive, pre-Christian, or non-Christian societies.³⁷ The Tartar woman warrior similarly aids to define cultural distance while bringing Mongol culture within the frame of narratives familiar to Europeans.

Amazons appear repeatedly in medieval writing on the East, for example in *The Letter of Prester John*, Mandeville, and Clavijo.³⁸ They are often conflated by modern scholars with the Christian inhabitants of the Isle of Women (as related by Marco Polo, Jordan, Niccolò, and Witte), but the latter are not warriors; they are a peaceful population of women who do nothing but nurse their children and collect fruit.³⁹ Amazons, though pagan, are mostly regarded as a kind of “noble monster”: chaste, attractive, and virtuous.⁴⁰ Despite her militarism and autonomy, the Amazon offers an alternative kind of femininity that is admirable because of her distance in time and/or place. The Mongol woman warrior’s construction in medieval travel writing may have held echoes of the Amazon for contemporary readers.

The presence of women warriors in travelers’ tales of Mongols reinforces the view of Mongolian society as essentially apart from contemporary Europe, to be treated not with disdain but extreme caution, yet also with the potential to fascinate and entertain readers. Even before European colonial activity in central and east Asia and its attendant Orientalism, eastern realms beyond the Islamic world possessed great imaginative potential for travel writers and their audiences. Travelers who wrote of Mongolian women warriors (as well as Amazons and the Isle of Women) share a willingness to add fictional and mythical elements to their narratives. The authors least inclined to stray from straight ethnography and travelogue, notably Carpini and Rubruck, were among those least likely to add tales of women warriors.

Latin Christian accounts of Mongolian women concentrate on hard work, agency, and influence within their society. Some authors added further elements, notably unattractiveness and, more often, military prowess. Mongolian women fit well within broader representations of the culture, with the emphasis on qualities of ferocity, stamina, endurance, and ruthlessness, but they also extend the narratives’ appeal into the realm of entertainment. “Difference” blurs into “similarity” and “sameness” in particular travelers’ accounts,

especially with the strength of the woman warrior theme in European literary history. Euben's theory of travel writers' rhetorical deployment of female figures as a "legend," "icon," or "index" for wider cultures is, then, largely confirmed by these examples. The desire to be informed played some role in accounts of Mongol women, most particularly in the works of the earliest diplomatic travelers; however, the theme of pleasure is also important. European male audiences liked the image of a woman with a sword or bow, so long as she was far from them.

Chinese Women: "The Most Beautiful in the World"

Although the area covered by modern China was under Mongolian control from 1279 to 1368, the population was mainly ethnic Chinese. European commentators recognized physical and cultural differences between Mongols and the peoples of Cathay and Manzi. By the end of the thirteenth century, interest in Asia was shifting toward trade and the region was viewed with admiration for its wealth, social and technological advancement, and myriad pleasures. European travelers unanimously approved of Cathay and Manzi, remarking in particular on their vast and well-organized cities, fine arts and crafts, and fertile landscapes, and many also remarked favorably on the Chinese people. For example, Carpini (who encountered ethnic Chinese while in Mongolia) comments, "They seem to be most affable and kindly men. They have no beard and their physiognomy is much like that of the Mongols, though they are not so broad in the face. They have their own language. Better artificers are not to be found in the whole world in all the trades in which men are wont to be engaged."⁴¹

Fewer travelers commented on Chinese women than on Mongolian. Several who journeyed to Cathay and Manzi were Franciscan missionaries and their relatively brief letters, which are among the least detailed of any of our sources, do not describe local women. "The Book of the Estate of the Great Caan" is in many ways more informative but says nothing of women. John of Marignolli is silent on the subject also, though admittedly his description of China is short. Our sources, then, are Marco Polo, Niccolò, and (briefly) Hetoum, Odoric, and Mandeville's fictional work. Far from finding a fearsome form of womanhood in China as travelers did in Mongolia, Europeans saw in the women a heightened femininity centered on sexual allure. With this narrow vision of femininity so dominant, Euben's view of women as indices of culture appears to come up short. Compared with both the reality of contemporary Chinese women's lives and also with Chinese ideals of the hardworking, obedient, and devoted wife, travelers' accounts are limited. Chinese women are viewed as little

more than pleasing, erotic objects, though in other respects Chinese civilization is held up as an ideal or model for European admiration. Yet given that travelers pay little attention to the private lives of Chinese, Euben's suggestion should not be forced too far.

The women of Ergiuul (Wuwei) on the western edge of China, according to a section of the *Divisament* found in most manuscript archetypes, are said to be plump and black-haired (as are the men) but also free of body hair and well made in every way. Men there choose their brides not for nobility or wealth but for beauty because they are much driven by lust and sensuality. A late fifteenth-century Venetian text adds that the women are "very white and have very fair flesh [*mult blances et ont mult belle chars*]." ⁴² Merchants' wives in Quinsai (Hangzhou) are "very delicate and angelic [*deliés et angelique*]" and ladies of Quenlinfu (Jian'ou) in Manzi are "beautiful [*belles*]." ⁴³ Hetoum of Armenia says of the varied people of Cathay that "one finds among them many attractive men and women, according to their nation [*nacion*]." ⁴⁴ Odoric of Pordenone is the most hyperbolic, remarking of the women of Manzi, "they are the most beautiful in the world." ⁴⁵ Mandeville similarly states, "In this country there are many beautiful women, more than in any other country beyond the sea." ⁴⁶ Odoric also offers the observation, which is unique among our authentic texts, that women are judged beautiful according to the smallness of their feet and therefore subject to foot binding by their mothers from infancy. ⁴⁷ Mandeville copies Odoric's observation of bound feet but places the detail into his version of the story of the lucky burgess who had fifty lovely damsels to serve him and attend to his every need. ⁴⁸



Figure 3. Feast offered by the Great Khân in Khanbaliq. Marco Polo, *Livre des merveilles du monde*. Bibliothèque nationale de France, fifteenth century. Photo credit: © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY.

Marco Polo treats some other eastern women as objects of erotic appeal, such as the ladies of Badascian (Badakhshan, now in northeastern Afghanistan and southeastern Tajikistan) who wear thick padded trousers of cotton and silk and pad out their trousers as thickly as possible “to show that they have large hips, because their men delight in fat women,” and the women of Chescemir (Kashmir), dark-skinned and lean like all the region’s inhabitants, who “are very beautiful for dark women.”⁴⁹ The young women who serve in the temples of Maabar (the Coromandel coast) are admired for their singing, dancing, and dexterity of movement and are said in one version to be “so firm in flesh that none can by any means take hold of them or pinch them in any part.” The narrator knows this because “for a small coin they will allow a man to pinch them as much as he can” and their breasts “do not hang down but are raised and prominent.”⁵⁰ Ludovico de Varthema says that the women of Calicut (Kozhikode) are attentive to personal hygiene, always washing and perfuming themselves before intercourse, and always scented and adorned with jewels.⁵¹ Marco Polo’s most negative physical description of women, indeed of any population, comes not in any account of Asia but of the island of Zanzibar: “the women of this island are a very ugly thing to see, for they have great mouths and large eyes and large noses. They have the breasts four times as large as other women.” Later versions add blackness of skin and large stature to the list of their negative attributes.⁵²

Chinese and southern Indian women seem to fit European expectations of feminine beauty. In some ways this is a surprise, as medieval European literature provides an extremely consistent, almost monotonous idealization of blond, blue-eyed maidens with white skin and rosy cheeks.⁵³ The connection of Cathayan and Manxian women with beauty, delicacy, and sensuality is perhaps part of the wider view of China as a place of luxury and refinement, while appreciation of Indian women fits with broader imagery of the fruits, spices, and pleasures of that land. Patricia Buckley Ebrey examines western writings on Chinese women over a longer period (from Marco Polo to 1890) and argues that the tendency to laud the beauty of Chinese women endured as long as authors wished to praise China itself. Those who praised China also praised its women; others were neutral on both matters; and in more recent times authors who disliked China usually criticized Chinese women as ugly.⁵⁴

Beauty segues with sexual allure in accounts of Chinese femininity. The *Divisament* describes hordes of prostitutes in the suburbs of Khanbaliq, though not within the city walls,⁵⁵ while Ramusio's version says the prostitutes of Quinsai (Hangzhou) are so expert in their arts that "the foreigners who have once indulged themselves with them stay as it were in an ecstasy, and are so taken with their sweetness and charms that they can never forget them."⁵⁶ Chinese prostitutes and brothels fascinated medieval and early modern travelers alike. Niccolò dei Conti, via Poggio, claims that "Public women are everywhere to be had, residing in particular houses of their own in all parts of the cities, who attract the men by sweet perfumes and ointments, by their blandishments, beauty, and youth; for the Indians are much addicted to licentiousness."⁵⁷ These whores were needed because of the sexual appetite of "Indians" and their ignorance of sodomitic vice (see Chapter 6). Gaspar de Cruz in the 1550s says prostitution is a profession reserved for the most unfortunate, including blind women who have attendants to paint their faces. Blind women's labor as prostitutes is equivalent to blind men's occupation of working in mills like horses, two men pushing each mill wheel. They are all slaves to the profession, as daughters of poor widows who are sold into the service of a pimp brought up to the work from childhood. "[I]n this country of China," he concludes, "there is no greater servitude than of these wenches."⁵⁸

An alternative brand of feminine appeal is found in a Latin version of the *Divisament* (the Z text), which describes Cathayan maidens as peerless in modesty. They do not dance or leap about or hang out of windows looking at passersby; they walk demurely in the street with eyes downcast, clad in headgear that prevents their looking upward; and they speak respectfully to their elders. They stay in female

quarters within the house working at feminine tasks and avoiding the company of their fathers, brothers, male elders, and suitors. Before marriage a maiden's virginity is tested by insertion of a dove's egg, or an older matron scratches the "virginal vein." Virgin's blood, it is said, cannot be washed out and thus can be distinguished from ordinary blood. To preserve their precious chastity Cathayan girls are taught to walk with very small steps, no longer than a finger length, lest they tear their hymens. All this, it is said, applies to the natives of Cathay and Manzi, not Tartars, since the latter take their wives and daughters riding with them "so that it may be supposed that the virginity of the latter may suffer somewhat thereby."⁵⁹ This remarkable passage presents Cathayan maidens as models of femininity such as might be admired in any of the conduct literature emerging in contemporary Europe and offers a fanciful perspective on the feminine enclosure idealized among Han Chinese.

Medieval European travelers were building up a picture of Chinese women that emphasized their allure, whether as luscious wives, dainty virgins, or prostitutes with remarkable talents. Ordinary mothers, working women, and the elderly are practically invisible in these narratives.⁶⁰ A brief survey of contemporary Chinese women's ways of life will help place these views in context.

When Marco Polo reached China in 1274 he encountered a culture whose basic framework of gender norms had been laid down many centuries earlier.⁶¹ A high level of standardization in familial organization and gender ideals prevailed across social classes, regions, and ethnic groups. The dominant influences on perceptions of women's roles and family life, according to Patricia Ebrey, were patrilineality, filial piety, and patriarchy—a set of separate yet interlocking principles that when set together influenced almost every aspect of women's lives.⁶² Bret Hinsch offers a similar view, suggesting pragmatism, patrilineality, and cosmology as the chief influences during the Qin and Han eras (221 BCE to 220 CE).⁶³ These factors remained powerful a millennium and more later. Almost all women of the late Song, Yuan, and early Ming eras married soon after puberty. The couple usually resided in the husband's home where the young wife was under the authority of her mother-in-law. By the Yuan period, ideally she did not remarry if predeceased by her husband.⁶⁴ The cosmological framework of *yin-yang* complementarity provided an essentialist basis for gender differences, ascribing toughness and high status to men, and gentleness and humility to women.⁶⁵

Customs surrounding property and dowries, on the other hand, had been subject to a number of changes and by the period of the later Song dowries could be very large. Bettine Birge argues that the Mongol conquests reduced daughters' rights to inheritance (which had

also grown during the Song period) as a means of ensuring the availability of large numbers of men bound in military tenure. This enforcement of patrilineal principles under the Yuan administration had influence until the late eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Another change was the invention and spread of foot binding by around the eleventh century CE, first among dancers and courtesans and becoming widespread from the late twelfth century on. This latter innovation, Ebrey suggests, was influenced by changing ideals of manhood. As masculinity was redefined as “refined, bookish, contemplative, or artistic” in opposition to the warrior cultures of China’s northern rivals (Turks, Khitans, Jurchens, and Mongols), femininity needed to be reinscribed in even stronger terms as “delicate, reticent, and stationary.”⁶⁷

Many of the aspects of women’s lives during the late Song, Yuan, and early Ming periods that have engaged the attention of recent historians were not described by medieval European travelers. It is perhaps unsurprising that Marco Polo, Odoric, and other travelers failed to mention women’s rights of inheritance or dowry entitlements, their engagement in land transactions, divorce proceedings, or the debate over widow remarriage and the morality of levirate matches⁶⁸ but more noticeable that working women, mothers, the poor, and the elderly are practically ignored. European fascination with the alluring and sexually available dominated representations of Chinese femininities. The paucity of more mundane references may be explained partly by considering the Chinese preference for segregating women and men, at least those of high rank, and enclosing them within the inner quarters of the household (as hinted in the Z text’s description of Cathayan maidens) compared with the open and active roles of Mongol women. Patricia Ebrey has explored in some detail the move toward segregation and enclosure of women during the Song period.⁶⁹ It was based on Confucian ideals of the separate functions of men and women, which came to be interpreted in architectural terms. It seems likely that sexual segregation grew in importance in the late imperial era (the early modern period, in western terms), as the seclusion of women became a crucial marker of family virtue and status, but the ideals were well established by the thirteenth century. Some of women’s roles in cloth manufacture, such as tending silkworms, spinning, reeling, and weaving cloth, also took place indoors.

Not all of Chinese women’s labor occurred behind closed doors, however. Ebrey describes how some Chinese contemporaries wrote of women’s work in the outdoors, such as Shu Yüen-hsiang’s (1217–1301) evocation of peasant women’s lives:

By the front hill the woman picking tea / Quickly takes up her basket, revealing her take. / The work is hard but she knows her task / ... At the edge of the field the waterwheel woman / Draws the water to let it circulate / Her black hat is pushed to the side in the burning sun. / Her blue skirt flaps noisily in the evening breeze. / ... The woman by the river pulling up fish / Every morning goes into the city. / Leaving her young child to watch the boat, / She trades her catch for wine for her drunkard husband.⁷⁰

Other contemporary Chinese poets commented on women splitting hemp as they went about other daily tasks, some even doing so while treading the waterwheel. Ebrey suggests that poets and painters seem to have found something “mildly erotic” about the sight of women laboring so hard.⁷¹ If she is right, then it was a form of titillation to which European observers were immune.

While poetry may not be reliable as a document of social practice, Ebrey also comments that the commercialization of Chinese society during the Song period and the growth of cities “provided women with new opportunities to make money” and that “innkeepers, for instance, were not uncommonly widows.”⁷² Jacques Gernet claims that in later thirteenth-century Hangzhou, although women of upper social ranks were mostly confined to their apartments, wives of petty traders commonly dealt with customers, women ran some restaurants, and other women were employed as “midwives, marriage go-betweens, nurses, and domestic servants of all kinds.”⁷³ These are all absent from medieval travelers’ descriptions of China. A rare description of women’s work is in the *Divisament*’s description of gender roles among the people of Çardandan (Jinchi, in western Yunnan). The men there, it is said, do nothing but go to war, hunt, and hawk, while women and the men captured as slaves in battle do all the work. Marco Polo’s interest, though, is really in the gender inversion practiced after childbirth.

And when the ladies have been confined and have given birth to a child, they wash him and wrap up in clothes, and the lord of the lady gets into bed and keeps the infant with him and lies in the bed forty days without getting up except for necessary duties. And all the friends and relations come to see him and stay with him and make him great joy and entertainment. And they do this because they say that the wife has borne great fatigue in carrying the infant in her womb and therefore they say that they do not wish her to bear more of it in that term of forty days. And his wife, as soon as she has given birth to her child, she gets up from the bed and does all the duty of the house and waits on her lord in the bed.⁷⁴

This description of couvade is mirrored in the writings of Li Jing, a Han Chinese official in the employ of the Yuan administration who produced a report of his travels through the Yunnan region while the Mongols were attempting to conquer Burma in 1303, suggesting either that Polo was aware of contemporary Chinese ethnographies of the area or that both descriptions were to some extent accurate.⁷⁵

As Bret Hinsch comments on an earlier period, it is important to

acknowledge disparity between elite dogma and popular practice when considering women's lives.⁷⁶ While segregation and enclosure must account in part for the limited views of western travelers, these ideals were not universally applied. It is not believable that Marco Polo or Odoric of Pordenone simply did not see Chinese women engaged in a wide range of activities during their many years in the region. Rather, women in medieval travelers' accounts of China were shorthand for the sensual delights of the region; depictions of working or otherwise ordinary women would have done little to serve the authors' wider rhetorical purpose.

Travelers' silence on contemporary Chinese ideals of femininity might, at first sight, seem more significant. In later medieval Europe the model of the "goodwife" was taking hold as a feminine ideal, particularly among urban artisan and mercantile societies. She was her husband's helpmeet and consort, complement and assistant, taking care of family and domestic duties so that he could be free to make his mark in commerce, law, and government. Her duties and qualities were outlined in the new conduct literature that appeared in European vernaculars from the mid-thirteenth century.⁷⁷ She was to be devout, charitable, thrifty, modest in dress, temperate in eating and drinking, and quiet and placatory in speech; she was also expected to abide within the home unless compelled to go out, apply herself to domestic tasks, teach her children, direct her servants, and be a good household manager.⁷⁸ The married woman thus came increasingly to usurp the virgin or contemplative as the paradigm of womanhood.

If travelers had been interested in looking for models of the goodwife, they would have found them among the Chinese elite. Women of upper-class households were encouraged to adopt the role of "inner helper" (*nei-chü*) during the Song period, according to Patricia Ebrey, while Beverly Bossler has explored the importance of the "faithful wife" in the Yuan.⁷⁹ Their duties differed in certain details from those of European goodwives, but the general principles were very similar. Wives attended husbands and parents-in-law selflessly, sewing, cooking, and serving food, attending to their physical comfort, making medicines, nursing them when ill, and sharing their personal chattels and jewels to cover household needs and expenses. Sometimes young wives also tended silkworms and did the weaving and mending; at other times they collected rents, managed property and the household, dealt with servants (including their husband's concubines), and, because many members of the educated classes were respectable rather than rich, strove to keep the household running on a thrifty and efficient budget. Ebrey writes that the epitaphs of such women praised them "because they made life so much easier for their husbands, letting them concentrate on the really

important things in life such as study, scholarship, or official service.”⁸⁰ The examples she offers of women who were admired for providing sage advice to their husbands are reminiscent of the women modeled in European conduct literature as mediators, negotiators, and peacemakers. Like their Christian counterparts, Chinese wives—Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian—were expected to live lives of exemplary piety.⁸¹

The limited representations of Chinese femininity encountered in medieval travel writing complicate Euben’s idea about women in travel writing because travelers’ tales of China regularly held up that country (especially during the period of Yuan or Mongol rule) as a kind of ideal mirror of Europe. If we were strictly to impose her model, we would find that the map of Chinese culture represented by the “legend” of women left out important features. Travelers passed up the opportunity to add to the picture of Sino-European congruence through describing the virtues of Chinese goodwives and working women. This is probably because much of what Europeans admired about China concerned its governance by Yuan rulers and the great trading cities under Mongol control. The private lives of its Chinese subjects were not their chief interest, and indeed European travelers may have seen little of what occurred behind Chinese doors. Chinese women do, however, offer a legend for reading the map of Chinese delights. For medieval Europeans the eastern Orient contained many riches, including beautiful and sexually available women. Views of China were doubled: on the one hand it was a mirror of many things late medieval Europe liked best about itself; on the other it was a fantasy land of abundant foodstuffs, beautiful women, and sex on demand.

Burning Women: “From Love of Him”

Most medieval travelers to India were struck by the phenomenon of widow burning. While the western tradition has been to call the act “suttee” or, more recently, *sati*, it has been noted that it is not the act but the woman subjected to it who is the *sati*.⁸² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak further protests that “Sati ... simply means ‘good wife’” (that term again) and that “*sati* or *suttee* as the proper name of the rite of widow self-immolation commemorates a grammatical error on the part of the British”—that is, of the colonists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, “white men, seeking to save brown women from brown men, impose upon those women a greater ideological constriction by absolutely identifying, *within discursive practice*, good-wifeness with self-immolation on the husband’s pyre.”⁸³ Thus it is a deep act of racial *and* gender colonization when

the word either refers to the act of burning or is restricted for use to the women who are burned, thus equating “good wives” with “burned widows.”

None of our authors uses *sati* or *suttee*; instead, each chooses to describe the event rather than find a label for it, as indeed Sanskrit authors do.⁸⁴ It is unclear whether all or indeed any of these authors witnessed a burning, though Jordan claims to have seen five widow sacrifices and Niccolò's account is quite detailed. What is perhaps most interesting about them, however, is that no single moral note is struck throughout. Let us take them in chronological order:

1. Marco Polo's description (c. 1298) of widow burning in Maabar comes in the midst of his account of profoundly foreign ritual practices, including the self-mutilation and suicide by stabbing (decapitation in some versions) practiced by some locals in devotion to certain idols and their veneration of oxen.⁸⁵ On widows, he states, “when a man is dead and his body is being burnt, his wife throws herself on to the fire herself and lets herself burn with her lord.” The repetition of reflexive pronouns in this passage emphasizes the voluntary nature of the act, an impression heightened by later versions of the work that state that she does this “from love of him,” and aids in contrasting between Indian admiration for women who immolated themselves and revilement for those who were too afraid.⁸⁶
2. Odoric (c. 1330) speaks of widow-burning in Polumbum (Quilon, now Kollam), a “detestable custom,” alongside purported gender inversion that allowed women (not men) to drink wine and to shave their foreheads (men did not shave their beards), though he points out there is no expectation of sacrifice placed on husbands whose wives have died.⁸⁷ He also locates the practice of wife burning in Zampa (Champa, now south and central Vietnam).⁸⁸
3. Jordan (c. 1330s) finds the practice in India the Less (the north and west coast north of Malabar) without making moral comment: “In this India, on the death of a noble, or of any people of substance, their bodies are burned: and their wives also follow them alive to the fire, and, for the sake of worldly glory, and for the love of their husbands, and for eternal life, burn along with them, with as much joy as if they were going to be married.” The women who do this are held in higher regard than those who do not: “A wonder [*mirabile*]!” Jordan claims to have seen five wives going to their deaths on funeral pyres beside their burning husbands.⁸⁹
4. Mandeville (c. 1356) follows Odoric's description of widow sacrifice in Polumbum but also precedes it by stating that the idolaters of this place (who in his account worship an image that is half ox, half man) sacrifice their children before such images, “sprinkling the idols with their blood.”⁹⁰
5. Poggio's account of Niccolò's voyage (1448) mentions the theme a number of times, including the most detailed description of all the travel narratives. He finds the practice in “central India,” where wives “are married under the express agreement that they should add to the splendor of the funeral ceremony by their death, and this is considered a great honor for them.” After the husband is laid out, a “vast funeral pyre is erected over him in the form of a pyramid, constructed of odiferous woods. When the pile is lighted the wife, richly dressed, walks gaily around it, singing, accompanied by a great concourse of people, amid the sounds of trumpets, flutes and songs.” A priest “exhorts her to a contempt of life and praises death, promising her all kinds of enjoyment with her husband, much wealth and abundance of ornaments,” and following further ritual she leaps into the fire. “If some show fear (for it frequently happens that they become stupefied by terror at the sight of the struggles of the others suffering in the fire), they are thrown into the fire by the bystanders, whether willing or not.”⁹¹ The wives of the Bachali priests are also burned with their

husbands, “lying by the side of the corpse, with her arm under his neck, she submits herself to the flames without giving way to any expression of pain.”⁹²

6. Hieronimo di Santo Stefano (c. 1500) says of the people of Coromandel (on the southeast Indian coast) that “when a man dies and they prepare to bury him, one of his wives burns herself alive with him; and this is their constant habit.”⁹³
7. Ludovico de Varthema (c. 1510), writing of Tenasserim (Tanintharyi, Burma), agrees that the wife commits herself to the flames voluntarily but also says that first she eats so much betel she “loses her wits” and that should she not go through with it she would be reviled and held as no better than “a public prostitute is among us.” He also indicates that the practice is rare.⁹⁴

Widow sacrifice was connected with other forms of ritual suicide practiced in India at the time of the travelers. Some acts were fundamentally displays of devotion and loyalty to an individual of higher rank—ruler, master, or husband—while others were directed at “the deity in its ‘terrible’ aspect: Shiva or Durga.”⁹⁵ The self-decapitations described by Marco Polo, Odoric, Jordan, and Niccolò are also described in Indian works from the third century CE and after.⁹⁶

Medieval European travelers were not the first westerners to offer views on widow burning: “From Strabo to Jules Verne, no other Indian rite was held in such great fascination by foreigners. ... One is tempted to say that it has the innate power to evoke, in its very immediacy and quintessence, an image of India forged in the West over two millennia, in which *realia* and *mirabilia* become so intertwined as to be lost in one another.”⁹⁷ Joerg Fisch says the oldest description of the ritual “*not part of a mythology or fiction*” is from the first century BCE and is not by an Indian but the Greek author Diodorus of Sicily.⁹⁸ It is quite difficult to sort out fiction from reality in either foreign or indigenous narratives. Fisch remarks on the paucity of detailed Indian references to “widow burnings that actually occurred,” although there are plenty of fictional and legal accounts and innumerable surviving memorial stones, inscriptions, and the like. The most detailed descriptions come from Muslim and Christian observers.⁹⁹ The problem is not whether we can credit the actual occurrence of widow burnings but rather that even “eyewitness” accounts are so influenced by narrative conventions it becomes impossible to know how authentically they portray the event.¹⁰⁰

Widow burning became dominant in later Christian and Muslim accounts of India and parts of southeast Asia, reaching their peak during the heyday of European colonialism on the subcontinent and East Indies. Lord William Bentinck, governor-general of India, outlawed the practice in Bengal in 1829 following several years of British condemnation that may itself have contributed to its wider propagation.¹⁰¹ While recent scholarship has emphasized a diversity of western views on the ritual in every period, as direct colonial rule intensified so did European efforts at prohibition.¹⁰² Scholars have

shown how the debate over widow burning became an emblem of British colonial interests in India and for Indian religious resistance and nationalism even into recent times.¹⁰³

Few topics can be as laden with emotion, debate, and horror as the discourse on sati. In the present discussion, the theme's primary value lies in offering a way of illuminating the gap between European precolonial and colonial perspectives on Asian cultures. The precolonial descriptions of widow burning are nothing if not varied. Any attempt to draw them together by asserting an emphasis on, for example, Christian morality or definitive Otherness would be misplaced. The travelers expressed a variety of judgments, from Odoric's outrage to Jordan's bland wonderment, though none seems to make the ritual emblematic of rottenness at the core of Indian societies as many colonial-era descriptions did. If they have anything in common, it is a tendency to view widow burning as illustrative of the exoticism of India. Ever since Greek antiquity, "India" had signified wonders and marvels to Europeans. It was the home of fabled monsters, a place of serpents, poisons, jewels, spices, and exotic fruits. The notion that an Indian "idolater" might cut off his own head, throw himself under a juggernaut, or sacrifice his own child were all of a piece with such imagery. Widow sacrifice fits the same picture, as is clear from Jordan's repeated exclamation, "*mirabile*." The burning widow, to this extent, does stand as an "icon" of the peoples and cultures of south India in medieval travelers' writing even though their perspectives differed one from another.

Conclusion

In a statement that would shape generations of feminist thought, John Stuart Mill asserted in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) that the status of women was "on the whole the surest and most correct measure of the civilization of a people or an age."¹⁰⁴ In this influential formulation, women's roles and experiences and the constructions of femininity within particular cultures are made to bear a heavy symbolic burden. Mill's statement would seem to have great applicability to modern perspectives on foreign cultures. In colonial-era narratives, women of Asia were often portrayed by European authors as victims of "Orientalist despotism," particularly in discourses on the highly charged subjects of widow burning and foot binding. Roxanne Euben's theory of women as an index of foreign cultures in travel writing sounds like a modern echo of Mill's statement but with the emphasis on "civilization" set aside. Her insight offers a most valuable way of framing medieval representations of Asian women so long as it is not forced to bear too

literal an interpretation.

Modern liberal thinking, such as represented by Mill, finds value in women's status and roles that probably would have surprised most medieval people, but oriental femininities were consistently intriguing to readers of medieval travel writing and confirmed broader imagery. Mongolian women are hardworking, lacking in sexual appeal, and encroach on male spheres of government and battle; Chinese women are nothing but sexual; and Indian women are notable chiefly for the exoticism of their self-sacrifice. Women lend strong support to wider precolonial constructions of the Orient as, variously, ferocious, enticing, or marvelous. Their representation was both a spice and a necessary substance in narrations of Orient.

Chapter 6

Sex

Sex was a common theme in medieval travel writing on Asia, but motifs of danger, decadence, and corruption were not so widely applied as they have been in more recent Orientalist narratives because the need to justify colonial rule was absent. When medieval authors included themes of sex and marriage in their narratives of the Orient, they did so with motives and emphases particular to their time. For them, pleasure could be simply pleasure, not seductive danger; moreover, for their audiences the connotations had primarily imaginative appeal as few would have the opportunity personally to experience Asian sexual cultures. The erotic themes of medieval travel writing may be taken as symptomatic of European sexual preoccupations of the day; thus modern questions about sexual identities and the constructions of categories of homosexual and heterosexual have no importance. While this may be unsurprising, it is also noteworthy that certain concerns that might be thought typically medieval, such as a connection between desire and sin, are relatively minor.

What intrigued European readers most about oriental erotics was the possibility of sexual plenitude, especially the idea of one man having access to numerous women. While some authors and readers connected these habits with immorality and incivility, travelers more often constructed images of an attractively exotic eastern eroticism. We can understand the appeal of this image best, I will suggest, by recognizing that for many medieval European men extramarital and non-monogamous sexual habits were understood as illicit but not inevitably alien and readily incorporated within visions of an enticing world. I argue further that the absence of sodomy from descriptions of the East is emblematic of a precolonial perspective, especially given that it was an available trope often used within contemporary Europe to condemn individuals or groups designated as beyond the pale and was also regularly used to criticize Asian peoples from the sixteenth century on.

The dominant elements in oriental sexualities are listed in

summaries from Marco Polo's *Divisament dou monde* that a fourteenth-century scribe inserted into his copy of Jacopo d'Acqui's *Imago mundi seu chronica*:

The book of Milio also says that in some places in the east and in the south all women and men until they are of four[teen?] years go in all ways naked. And when a woman is no more virgin she puts herself a little covering of something in front of the belly. And men put nothing as in most cases, and sometimes a few [do so].

It is said that in India and farther under the sun no woman is married if she is virgin. But she whom the more men have had is the better married, because she is said to be more pleasing. And anyone who lies with her [gives] her some token that he has had her for proof of the fact. And if she conceives from any one of the aforesaid, [the child] is brought up by him who takes her to wife, and is heir in the house with others who are born.

It says that in another place all women are common as if they were animals; and whoever wishes takes and when he wishes sends [them] away. And if a son or daughter is born he follows the mother, but none cares about the father. And for the [time] that one keeps her she does all the duties for the man and works continually. But the men are at leisure for amusements.

In some places among the barbarians they have such a custom. For when a man takes a wife, they lead [her] to a priest that there she may give her offering to her god. And after the offering the priest leads her into his chamber, and after he has known her he gives her to her husband; and thus she is said then to be hallowed. And there are many priests in every place, all ordered as if by parishes. But none but a virgin is given to a priest.

There is some place among the barbarians where there is such a custom. A man takes many wives, namely as many as he wishes; and each stays by herself separate from another, though all in the same district. And they are called among themselves associated wives of the lord. Each keeps her household as well as she can, and they all labour. And they supply their husband with all things as well as they can. And she who does better for him is more loved by him. To day he is with one and to morrow with another, and so he goes round them all continually, and eats and lies there. And if by chance he falls ill, he stays until he is cured in the house of her where he took the sickness. And if it happen that that man die, she who the more loves him is buried alive with him. And she counts this a very great joy, because in the other world she alone is his wife.¹

The scribe thus collects and compresses some of Polo's scattered references to sexual habits across a vast sweep of the eastern hemisphere, removing them from specific locations and replacing them in a notional "east," "south," "India," or "some place." We might give each item a label: "The Nakedness Topos"; "Feminine Promiscuity"; "The Communal Woman"; "The Cuckold Ideal"; and "The Polygynous Household."²

This chapter will collect travelers' descriptions and anecdotes on oriental sexualities under these five headings, thus extending a task already started with the previous chapter's account of prostitutes and the beauty of Chinese women. We have seen that Asian women were not always linked to sex in the travel accounts, but will find that sex was almost always linked to women. Oriental sexualities in medieval European representation were, in modern terms, overwhelmingly heterosexual; to use medieval vocabulary, they take "natural"

behaviors as their focus. This pattern is at odds with colonial-era travel literature in which travelers and Orientalists commonly ascribed same-sex practices and preferences to men of the East. I examine examples of each theme in turn, then consider the implications of sodomy's absence and scarcity of references to sexual encounters between European men and Asian women. Detailed analysis of the whole subject will be left to the latter part of the chapter.

The Nakedness Topos

Nakedness possessed a powerful force and range of interpretative possibilities in medieval Christian traditions, by no means all of them sexual. Margaret R. Miles has argued for a distinction between religious and social meanings of nudity in medieval traditions. Religious representations, she suggests, were "generally statements of committed resistance to secular or 'fallen' society. ... [T]o be stripped of clothing was to be stripped of secular socialization, to be divested of acculturation, to repudiate investment in the social world." In contrast with this positive spectrum of associations, social meanings inscribed nakedness with "powerlessness and passivity ... with captives, slaves, prostitutes, the insane, and the dead." In martyrdom narratives stripping the condemned was meant to "humiliate, torture or punish" and marked the chasm between the powerful (clothed) and the wretched (naked). These distinctions are complicated still further by gender. Where the nude male body could stand for "Christian commitment," incorporating classical ideals of the physical heroism of nude athletes, the female nude took on the naked body's abject associations, becoming "a cipher for sin, sex, and death."³ How far do medieval travelers' accounts of nakedness match up to these views?

Marco Polo's *Divisament*, in many passages, links nakedness with carnality and sexual incivility. The people of Necuveran (Nicoveran, now Nicobar Islands), he says, lack a king or governance and are "like beasts. And I tell you that they all go naked both males and women and cover themselves with nothing whatever in the world." A later fifteenth-century Venetian translator allowed his imagination to run riot, adding that "[t]hey use carnally together as dogs do in the road wherever they may be without any shame, not having any respect, the father to the daughter nor the son to the mother, for each one does as he wishes and he can. This people is without any law."⁴ The people of Seilan (Ceylon/Sri Lanka) and Maabar (southeast India) go naked, too, apart from their genitals, but having rulers, jewels, and riches aplenty they are not condemned like the Nicoverans.⁵ The kingdom of Coilum (Quilon, now Kollam) is a place of great fertility and abundance, heat,

strange beasts (black lions, beautiful parrots, peacocks, exotic hens), all kinds of fruits never found in Europe, and “all things different from ours, and they are more beautiful and better.” The men and women of this quintessentially exotic place are quite black “and all go naked except that they cover their natural parts with a very beautiful cloth. They do not hold for sin any self-indulgence nor any carnal sin,” nor do they observe strict rules of incest avoidance, allowing marriage to first cousins and fathers’ or brothers’ widows.⁶ Nudity does not have a single meaning in these descriptions, and the distinction between meanings of male and female nakedness suggested by Miles is lacking. Rather, both masculine and feminine nakedness are associated with eastern and southern sensuality. In many contexts nakedness is also indicative of the venerable type of the uncivilized barbarian.

Odoric finds that the people of Lamori (an island probably north of Sumatra), where all women are held “in common,” go naked on account of the heat and says they mocked him for wearing clothes.⁷ Mandeville’s passage on Lamori follows Odoric’s.⁸ The islanders of Nicoveran go naked, too, according to Odoric, and while no sexual or marital customs are mentioned he asserts that they have faces like dogs, worship the ox, and practice anthropophagy on their prisoners of war.⁹ John of Monte Corvino seems to link hot climate, nakedness, and temptation in his description of India, advising that only missionaries of most sound character be sent and that “the people there go naked, only covering the loins. And thus the arts and crafts of our tailors and cordwainers are not needed, for they have perpetual summer and no winter.”¹⁰ The slightly earlier Franciscan letter of unclear authorship says of India that “the sins of the flesh they count not to be sin” and that both the men and women are very well formed, are olive in complexion, and go barefoot and naked save for a loincloth.¹¹

Yet nakedness is not always tainted with negative moral meaning in travel texts. It is occasionally neutral, as when Hetoum comments that the black-skinned people of the southeast Asian islands “all go naked because of great heat,” though he also notes their worship of idols.¹² Jordan mentions the nakedness of peoples of India and the islands of southeast Asia without either censure or praise.¹³ But the theme of *holy* nakedness is much more common than such neutral accounts and provides a counterpoint to nudity as an aspect of sensual and uncivilized conduct. This shapes the *Divisament’s* account of the ascetic “ciugui” or yogi of Maabar. When asked why they have no shame in showing their members they reply that they wish nothing of this world.¹⁴ Their holiness is tested by the caresses of the temple maidens who “touch them both here and there in many parts of the body, they embrace them and put them in the greatest pleasure in the

world. And that man who is handled in such a way by the maidens of whom I have told you, if his member is not moved at all except as it was before the maidens touch him, this one is [counted] good and they keep him [in the order] with them.” Conversely, anyone who is aroused by the damsels is immediately cast out of the order.¹⁵ Polo’s account of the life of “Sagamoni Burcan” (taken from the Mongolian name for Gautama Buddha), memorialized in a monument in Ceylon, includes the claim that as a young man his father tried to tempt him with thirty thousand beautiful maidens (other versions say three hundred, others three) who “put him to bed and served him at table and made him company all day,” singing and dancing, all to no avail.¹⁶ Marignolli likewise praises the holy monks of Ceylon, who do not eat flesh, “go naked from the loins upwards,” and conduct themselves well in all things.¹⁷ Mandeville probably draws upon Vincent of Beauvais, *The Letter of Prester John*, and other sources in speaking of the virtues of the “Bragine” (Brahmans) for their lack of pride, covetousness, lechery, gluttony, materialism, thievery, lascivious women, liars, or murderers, as well as their disdain for fine clothes and other things of the world. He also notes the Midrache (or Oxydrachae) and Genesophe (Gymnosophisti), who share many of the same qualities.¹⁸ Ludovico de Varthema finds this link between holiness and nakedness among the Gujarati of Cambay (Khambhat) in northwest India.¹⁹

While meanings of Oriental nakedness do not fully conform to the model sketched by Miles, particularly in the extension of sensual associations of nudity to males as well as females, her emphasis on the naked human body’s capacity to stand for both sin and virtue is borne out. Furthermore, gender distinctions are apparent with regard to the latter. Nakedness may be associated with holiness for certain Indian males, but travel literature lacks depictions of eastern women whose virtue is signified by nakedness. Bare bodies may have various meanings for males, but for women they consistently refer to sexual availability. This is frequently comprehended through a Christian lens of temptation and sin, but the most negative appraisals are saved for contexts condemned for lack of governance, law, and civility. Therefore, nakedness signifies different meanings, dependent not only on gender but also on location and the broader elements of the culture within which it is observed.

Feminine Promiscuity

Jacopo d’Acqui’s copyist’s depiction of women who are sexually active with multiple partners before marriage “in India and farther under the sun” connects with Polo’s description of Tibet. No man there wants to

have a virgin for a wife but prefers partners with extensive sexual experience. Upon the arrival of strangers the old women bring their daughters and offer the girls to the men to do with as they would. Afterward the man is obliged to give the girl a token to hang around her neck; the tokens indicate how many lovers she has had, and the more tokens, the more eligible the girl. As Polo (or Rusticello) enthuses, this is a country to which “young gentlemen from sixteen years to 24 will do well to go.” The interpolations of later translators add jocular or judgmental glosses to the story. A mid-fifteenth-century Venetian version calls the custom “pleasing”; Friar Pipino, in contrast, terms it “an absurd and most detestable abuse coming from the blindness of idolatry.”²⁰

Polo’s accounts of Gaidu (probably Xiangchiang, now in Sichuan by the Tibetan border but formerly part of Yunnan province), Kamul (now Kumul or Hami), and Pem (probably Keriya), the latter two of which are now in Xinjiang province in the far west of present China, also include tales of women with multiple partners but focus on married women and sex as an element of local hospitality. In Gaidu the local men (called “wretches” in this rather negative passage) are happy for visitors to sleep with their wives, daughters, sisters, or other women living under their roofs because “they say that for this deed their god and their idols do better for them and give them temporal things in great abundance.” So keen are local men for foreigners to take advantage of their hospitality that they will happily stay away from home for days at a time, and the visitor need only hang a hat or some other token outside the house to show he is still busy with the woman inside. The Z Latin manuscript of c. 1470 adds numerous details, claiming that the men and women who dwell by the mountain roads of the region mock the merchants who pay the women with perhaps half an ell of thin cloth for their sexual favors, goading them for their foolishness in giving away an item yet receiving nothing tangible in return.²¹ The men of the nearby kingdom of Iaci (Yunnan-Fu, now Kunming) similarly care little about other men touching their wives so long as the wife consents.²²

In Pem (Keriya) women may enter temporary marriages during their husbands’ long absences: “For when a woman has a husband and he leaves her to go on a journey, and provided that he must stay away from twenty days upwards, the woman as soon as her husband is set out to go on a journey, she takes a[nother] husband. ... And the men wherever they go take [temporary] wives also.”²³ Neither the men nor the women of Pem are expected to cope for long without sexual intercourse, but by mentioning the wives first Polo gives the impression that the activity of the women is more noteworthy. Friar Pipino adds a moralizing gloss by calling it a “local erroneous”

usage.²⁴ A further variant comes in the *Divisament's* account of sexual hospitality among the people of Kamul. The people make an easy living from the fruit of the land and are much given to amusement, playing music, singing, dancing, and taking physical pleasure where they can, and the men offer their wives to visitors: "the women are fair, gay and wanton." Pipino adds that the people do this because they have been "led astray from of old by their idols." Möngke Khân, writes Polo, attempted to outlaw the practice on conquering the area but had to abandon his efforts at sexual reform because the locals were so attached to the custom and credited their economic prosperity to their idols' pleasure in it.²⁵ Some established medieval traditions on eastern wonders included "wife-givers" among oriental marvels, found for example in the apocryphal "Letter of Pharasmanes to the Emperor Hadrian" and the Anglo-Saxon "Wonders of the East," so the information may blend textual tradition with ethnographic observation.²⁶

To Han Chinese of the Yuan period, as to their Mongol conquerors, such flouting of marital chastity was outrageous. While elite men kept concubines and prostitutes thronged the streets or suburbs of many cities, it was another matter for daughters and wives to be free with sexual favors and shocking for parents and husbands to encourage such looseness. Female promiscuity was linked to ethnic groups on the geographic margins of Yuan China, not with the dominant Mongol or Han populations. In 1303 Li Jing described the peoples of the Yunnan region.²⁷ Among the Bai people, "Unmarried girls and widows can come and go as they please without restraint; the young men, who are known as 'splendid ones' [*miaozi*], roam about at night, either playing their multi-reed pipes or singing ballads, the harmonies of which express their affections. When their affection is mutual, they then go off in pairs to have sex, and only afterwards do they get married."²⁸ Among the Luoluo (Yi), "A woman who is about to get married must first have relations with the shaman, and then 'dance' [presumably a euphemism] with all the groom's brothers. This custom is known as 'making harmony.' Only after that can she be married to her husband. If any one of the brothers refuses to go along with this custom, he will be regarded as unrighteous and everyone will be disgusted with him."²⁹ Among the Gilded Teeth "Bai" Barbarians (Jinchi Baiyi, a Dai people), "[i]n marriage they do not make distinctions between close relatives. There is not much importance attached to virginity, and they are as profligate as dogs and swine. ... If a woman dies before marrying, all the men who had relations with her must hold up a banner to see her off, and if the banners number a hundred it is considered the most beautiful. Her parents cry and lament: 'How could we have known that a woman with so many lovers could have

died so young!”³⁰ This passage has intriguing similarities with the *Divisament*’s account of Tibet and the claims of the *Imago mundi*. The women of the “Moxie Barbarians” (Mosuo or perhaps Naxi) similarly, in his account, “have no prohibitions regarding licentious behavior.”³¹

While each of these regions has unique sexual customs, female promiscuity is their common element. The people of these places are reportedly unconcerned with sexual ownership of women. Each of the examples cited comes from Marco Polo’s *Divisament* and its medieval translations. The wide readership for the book and the diverse perspectives of its translators and copyists account for the apparently contradictory treatments of the theme among versions of the book, from relatively amused and playful to more moralizing in Latin and some other translations. But perhaps we should not be too quick to distinguish between the practices of casting moral judgment and experiencing amusement and pleasure. Consuelo Wager Dutschke has found that Latin manuscripts of the *Divisament* recurrently feature the marginal remark “*turpis consuetudo*” (foul custom) near descriptions of eastern sexual habits, yet the very act of marking the page in this fashion might indicate prurience or salaciousness rather than condemnation. The annotation could mark a passage one might wish to return to, in the way a manicule does.³² The Dominican Filippino da Ferrara, revealingly, offered his fellow friars Polo’s anecdote concerning men (presumably those of Kamul) who offer their wives to visitors as part of their hospitality not because he wanted to cast moral judgment but as a suggestion for making edifying conversation in his *Liber de introductione loquendi* (c. 1325–47).³³ In reading about eastern women’s willing erotic availability, European readers were capable of experiencing both disapproval and delight.

The Communal Woman

The third of the *Imago*’s sexual topoi, on the unnamed place where “all women are common as if they were animals,” is less frequently deployed by travel writers but is more clearly condemnatory. Odoric’s description of the people of Lamori, who not only go naked but also hold women in common, where there is no recognition of marital ties, and where women decide on the paternity of their children, is a potential source for the *Imago*’s passage. The *Relatio* goes on to call the people “pestilent” and “evil” [*“pestifera. . . et nequam”*], adding anthropophagy to their vices.³⁴ The “barbarian” image is here dominant once again. Mandeville probably draws on this as well as Caesar’s account of ancient Britons in *De Bello Gallico*, adding incest, when telling of certain islands in the very distant East where people will not eat hares, hens, or geese (though they keep many for the

pleasure in looking at them) and men marry their own daughters, sisters, and kinswomen, with ten or twelve people living together in a house with no regard for monogamy. Whenever a woman has a child she gives it to whichever man first slept with her, so no man may tell for certain which are his children and which are another's.³⁵

While polygyny was commonly commented on by European travelers, polyandry was much rarer in texts as in reality. Descriptions of Calicut (Kozhikode) are the exception in this. Niccolò dei Conti says "the women are allowed to take several husbands, so that some have ten or more." He describes how the husbands all contribute to the wife's maintenance and mark her door when visiting her to alert any of the others who might come along. The wife decides which of her husbands should be allotted to each of her children, and to allow this system to work inheritances pass not from fathers to children but to their nephews.³⁶ Hieronimo di Santo Stefano also says of Calicut that "[e]very lady may take to herself seven or eight husbands, according to her inclination,"³⁷ and Ludovico de Varthema says friends within the Calicut merchant class would sometimes exchange wives while among other classes "one woman has five, six, and seven husbands, and even eight." The women of this latter group allocate children to particular husbands as they wish.³⁸ The authors may have been simply borrowing descriptions from one another's books. Conversely, they may have reported cultural practice, though with a certain geographical looseness. Polyandry in northern India and Tibet has been the subject of modern anthropological study.³⁹

The idea of a woman being "held in common" by a number of men was anathema to medieval Christian sexual ethics, which insisted on exclusive male sexual rights over individual women. The *meretrix* or "common woman," as Ruth Mazo Karras has amply documented, was not only a "prostitute" in the modern sense of a woman who takes money for sex but one to whom a number of men had sexual access.⁴⁰ The conventional Christian view explains the *Imago* scribe's comparison between holding women in common and bestial habits, and Odoric's revulsion, yet it is intriguing that other authors' accounts of wife sharing or polyandrous customs lack the tone of condemnation one might expect. We will come back to this matter shortly.

The Cuckold Ideal

The *Imago's* account of priests specially appointed for the deflowering of virgins finds its nearest counterpart not in Marco Polo's *Divisament* but in one of the most arresting passages in *The Book of John Mandeville*, where it comes in the midst of describing monsters in the distant East. There is a land, says Mandeville, where the custom is for

husbands to give their new brides to other men for deflowering (*despuceller*) and that indeed there are in a town there certain lowly men (*valletz*) who do no other work than this, and they are called “Cadibiriz”—“fools despaired” (*fol desesperez*). It is thought dreadfully dangerous, even life-threatening, to take the maidenhead of a woman. If for any reason the husband finds his wife still a virgin the following night he is entitled to bring the negligent *vallet* before the justices, just as he would if the young man had threatened him with death. And yet after this first night the women of the land are kept so tightly under watch that they never have the chance to speak to those men. Mandeville claims he asked the locals the origin of the custom, “and they told me that in ancient times some men died as a result of deflowering their wives, who have serpents in their bodies; and therefore they hold to that custom and always have another man try the passage [*assaier le passage*] before putting themselves to that venture [*se mettent en aventure*].”⁴¹ The story has puzzled some modern readers. Letts said that the source had not been traced though “there is something like it” in Vincent of Beauvais with possible links to Solinus and Pliny.⁴² Seymour links it more definitively to Vincent’s account of the Augylae of Libya, drawing in turn on Solinus’s misreporting of Herodotus.⁴³

Mandeville was not the only medieval traveler to describe wedding night cuckoldry, but he seems to be the only one to cite vagina-dwelling snakes as its rationale. Calicut is, again, the notable location. Hieronimo says, “The men never marry any woman who is a virgin; but if one, being a virgin, is betrothed, she is delivered over before the nuptials to some other person for fifteen or twenty days in order that she may be deflowered.”⁴⁴ Ludovico claims that when the king of Calicut takes a wife he selects an honorable Brahman and requires him to sleep with the bride on their first night of marriage “in order that he may deflower her.” He adds that the priests are not at all willing to perform this service so the king must pay them to do it and, furthermore, that a priest stays with the queen and is intimate with her when the king goes on journeys away from home. As a result the king’s heir is usually the son of one of his sisters, or another near relative if no sororal nephews exist, because “it is certain that his [the king’s] sister and he were born of the same person, and there is more certainty about her than about his own children.”⁴⁵ In Tenasserim, however, Ludovico claims to have more personal experience of a similar custom. The men of that city sought not priests but foreigners, whether Christians or Muslims, to deflower their brides, and Ludovico says that he and his traveling companion were importuned by a local merchant in this way. Ludovico’s companion agreed to the task and so slept with the merchant’s fifteen-year-old bride on her wedding night:

“[A]fter the first night, it would have been at the peril of his life if he had returned again, although truly the lady would have desired that the first night had lasted a month.”⁴⁶

The closest counterpart to Mandeville’s tale of which I am aware (though, no doubt, Asianists could identify others) is in Sinologist Wolfram Eberhard’s description of Yao and Thai traditional cultures, where girls had the right to choose their husbands and to have several sexual partners before marriage, only becoming monogamous with the arrival of the first child.⁴⁷ Tellingly, Eberhard claims that folktales relating the poisonous qualities of virgins, which were thought to be fatal to the first man to have sexual relations with them, were widespread in nineteenth-century southern Chinese cultures. In addition, among the Yao in southern China married women could make contracts to live with another man as his wife for two years, any children of the match going to the second husband.⁴⁸ The origins of Mandeville’s account remain unclear, but European learned traditions, travelers’ tales, and southern Asian folklore together provide the necessary pieces of the puzzle even if no other author put them together in quite the same way.

For our purposes, what matters most is that rumors of “some places among the barbarians” where men willingly allowed other men to take the maidenhead of their wives found a place in travel narratives of the East. Only Mandeville makes the link between sexual contact and female toxicity. The others add to the seductive vision of oriental sexual license where women are freely available and possess considerable sexual agency.

The Polygynous Household

The *Imago*’s fifth sexual topos, on polygyny, takes us to the heart of Europeans’ fascination with eastern sexual and marital practices. Throughout their travels in Asia, Europeans found households containing one male head and multiple wives and/or concubines. Carpini found these among the Mongolians, claiming men took as many wives as each could afford, “one a hundred, another fifty, another ten”; each wife has her own household and the husband sleeps with a different wife each night. Although only one of them merits the status of chief wife, “[i]n spite of their numbers, they never easily quarrel among themselves.”⁴⁹ Mongolian polygamy was commented on by several observers—Rubruck, Andrew of Longjumeau, Simon of St. Quentin, Ricold, and Hetoum—alongside the Mongols’ apparent lack of regard for fornication and for sexual taboos that would be defined as incestuous in Christian contexts, despite their strict adherence to laws banning adultery.⁵⁰ Hetoum is

puzzled by Mongolian morals (they think it no sin to kill a man yet a mortal sin to place a bit in a horse's mouth) and claims that they think lechery to be no sin because they have multiple wives,⁵¹ but generally speaking the European observers comment dispassionately on Mongol polygyny.



Figure 4. Banquet to celebrate Khubilai Khân's birthday. Marco Polo, *Li Livres du Graunt Caam*. Oxford, Bodleian Library. Photo credit: De Agostini Picture Library, Bridgeman.

Marco Polo added the view of plural marriage and concubinage as motivated by masculine lust, as is the case in his account of the men of Ergiuul who choose their wives for their beauty rather than high birth and may take as many wives as they wish and are able to keep.⁵² The *Divisament's* very approving account of Khubilai Khân includes mention of his four "true" wives who hold the title of empress and adds a highly colored description of the Khân's concubines and the process by which they are selected. Each year, he says, one hundred of the most beautiful maidens of the Ungrat people are brought to the Khân to be inspected by the ladies of his court. The ladies sleep beside the damsels and check that they have fresh breath and are virgins. The girls are then sent to wait upon the Khân in groups of six "both in the room and in the bed and for all that he needs" for three days and nights at a time, until all one hundred have been tested and he makes

his final selection.⁵³ Ramusio's later version credits polygamy with ensuring the large population of Cathay and the multitude of civil servants employed to supply communications and keep good order.⁵⁴

Given that monogamy, along with indissolubility, was one of the cornerstones of medieval Christian marriage it seems curious that travelers were able to depict Asian plural partnerships with neutrality and even endorse them. Polo's description of the people of Caugigu (possibly Kiao-Chi-kwe, Tonkin in northern Vietnam) might demarcate the limit of observer tolerance for polygyny. The king is "so self-indulgent that he has quite three hundred wives; for when they have any fair woman in the country, he takes her to wife";⁵⁵ perhaps what could be forgiven in Khubilai Khân, or absorbed into a general picture of the splendor of his court, was not regarded so indulgently in other eastern potentates. On the other hand the *Divisament* expresses wonder at the king of Champa (approximately southern and central Vietnam), who reserves preemptive rights to beautiful girls about to be married and bestows dowries on those he decides not to take: "I tell you that in the year 1285 I Marc Pol was there and at that time this king had three hundred and twenty-six children."⁵⁶ The people of Maabar, otherwise noted for their near nakedness and incredible wealth in jewels and pearls, also have a super-potent king with "quite five hundred women, these are wives. For I tell you that as soon as he sees a beautiful lady or girl then he wishes her for himself." The king even took his own brother's beautiful wife.⁵⁷ In another instance, King Asciar of Maabar—praised for his wealth, justice, and support for foreign traders—has three hundred or more women because of the honor polygamy conferred.⁵⁸

Odoric's king of Zampa (Champa) reigns over a fine and fertile region and has around two hundred children with his many wives and other women. He also has fourteen thousand tame elephants.⁵⁹ When Mandeville adapts the passage he keeps the fourteen thousand elephants but increases the king's marital haul to a thousand beautiful wives. Though he sleeps with each wife only once, the king has many children.⁶⁰ Odoric's (and subsequently Mandeville's) tale of a burgess of Manzi and his fifty virginal damsels also presents images of sensuous luxury. The virgins, it is said, wait continually on their master, serving him at dinner and singing and playing music as he eats, feeding him as if he were a pet sparrow.⁶¹ In describing "the land of the Great Khan" Mandeville takes Carpini's century-old account of Mongolian polygyny and levirate marriage almost word for word from Vincent of Beauvais's encyclopedia.⁶² In contrast to pagan sexual surfeit stands the figure of Prester John, a model of Christian chastity, whose bed of gold and sapphires confounds lechery and who sleeps with his wife but four times a year and only to beget children.⁶³

Niccolò says that in Vijayanagar the men “marry as many wives as they please, and these wives are burned with their dead husbands.” Their king takes up to twelve thousand wives, four thousand of whom follow him on foot wherever he goes and also take care of the cooking. A few thousand more ride on horseback and the “remainder is carried in litters, of whom two or three thousand are selected as his wives on condition that at his death they will voluntarily burn themselves with him.”⁶⁴ The men of Java and Borneo, whom he reviles for their unclean eating habits and cruelty, may satisfy their desires by taking as many wives as they like.⁶⁵ Poggio attempts to sum up marital practices in the three Indies, saying the “inhabitants of central India [from the Indus to the Ganges] are only allowed to marry one wife; in the other parts of India [from Persia to the Indus, and all the regions east of the Ganges] polygamy prevails very generally, excepting among those Christians who have adopted the Nestorian heresy.”⁶⁶ Ludovico tells a lurid tale of the Sultan Machamuth, Muslim conqueror of Cambay (Khambhat), with his twenty thousand horsemen, fifty gnudeflecting elephants, and five dozen instruments played to accompany his dinner, a great white beard and mustaches tied over his head, and a habit of consuming a little poison every day to immunize himself against occasions when he chooses to eliminate his enemies through public poisoning. It is in keeping with his general excess and cruelty that he “has three or four thousand women, and every night that he sleeps with one she is found dead in the morning.”⁶⁷

An Orientalist note is thus struck in Ludovico’s 1510 narrative in its association of despotism, sexual excess, and danger that is mostly absent among the writings of the medieval travelers. What all have in common once again, however, is that households across the Asian continent, from Mongolia to Java, are portrayed as notable for sexual plurality. While in some contexts this is counted against the people as indicative of their baseness or debauchery, more often it becomes a matter of entertainment and fascination.

A final story also seems in accord with the sensual aspect of Saidian Orientalism, but it is unclear whether it was a mid-sixteenth-century addition to the *Divisament*. This is the *Divisament*’s account of the conquest of Manzi (the southern Song empire) by Khubilai during the reign of “King Facfur” or “Fanfur.” Medieval manuscripts of the *Divisament* comment briefly that Facfur “was not a valiant man of arms, but his delight was with women.”⁶⁸ Ramusio’s revision of Polo’s book c. 1550 turned this brief comment into an allegory of sensuality, emasculation, and political decay. The luxury-loving king was complacent about his kingdom’s security and spent his days in pleasure-grounds with innumerable fair damsels whom he liked to

watch running after deer and bathing naked in a lake: “And with all this continual dalliance with women he grew up without knowing what arms might be.”⁶⁹ Confronted by Mongol forces, the pusillanimous king fled, leaving the great city of Quinsai (Hangzhou) in the hands of his queen. Modern translations of the *Divisament* frequently include the addition, creating the impression that the connection of eastern sensual indulgence and political impotence was struck by Marco Polo himself, but it has not been noted in any of the surviving manuscripts.⁷⁰ It is not possible to say whether it comes from a lost archetype or was Ramusio’s own addition.

Before pulling together the implications of these five sexual topoi, we must consider the significance of the relative absence of two erotic themes that would become key elements of sexualities in Orientalist representation: “sodomy” and East-West sexual encounters.

Sodomy: The Missing Motif

Each set of anecdotes already discussed assumes male-female partnerships.⁷¹ Same-sex couplings (whether between men or women) and other “unnatural vices” are rare indeed in medieval travelers’ accounts of Asia. It is worth considering this point in a little more detail, as it helps provide a key to the difference between precolonial and colonial perspectives on Oriental sexualities. As Bret Hinsch asserts, many early modern European travelers to China condemned the Chinese for unnatural vices: “For them, the popularity of the ‘abominable vice of sodomy’ was an unforgivable flaw in an otherwise admirable society.”⁷² Hinsch’s earliest western source is the report of Galeote Pereira, a Portuguese trader imprisoned in China in 1548–49: “The greatest fault we do find in them is sodomy, a vice very common in the meaner sort, and nothing strange among the best.”⁷³ Gaspar de Cruz, a Dominican missionary in China during 1555–56, expressed revulsion at a land he perceived as a new Sodom, poised for devastation by earthquakes and floods as God’s retribution for “the filthy abomination ... the accursed sin of unnatural vice” to which Chinese men were so partial.⁷⁴ Matteo Ricci, Jesuit missionary in China from 1582 to his death in 1610, was disgusted by “public streets full of boys got up like prostitutes.”⁷⁵ Elizabethan travel anthologist Samuel Purchas extended the accusation from the Chinese to the Mongols, casually remarking that “[t]hey are addicted to Sodomie or Buggerie.”⁷⁶

As is now widely acknowledged, “sodomy” was a highly flexible term in premodern usage. In ancient Hebrew, early Christian, and early medieval texts it more often signaled breach of obligations of hospitality than sexual transgression. Even as it more often came to

include sexual infraction, it still potentially encompassed any form of “vice against nature” and into the early modern era could still refer to a generalized opposition to state, society, and God.⁷⁷ Ludovico de Varthema says the crime of the inhabitants of the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah was lack of gratitude to God for providing manna to live upon in that barren region.⁷⁸ Although sodomy was increasingly connected with sex acts between men from the twelfth century on, one can never assume that this is the meaning imputed by premodern authors. Even if interpreted in solely erotic terms, “sodomy,” “buggery,” and “unnatural vice” could encompass same-sex practices, bestiality, and non-reproductive acts between men and women. When in 1885 Sir Richard F. Burton devised his notorious “Sotadic zone” (a geographic and climatic zone identified by its inhabitants’ enthusiasm for pederasty that spanned the world from the Mediterranean through the Middle East and Asia to the Pacific and Americas), his account of Chinese erotics implies indiscriminate perversity: “The Chinese, as far as we know them in the great cities, are omnivorous and omnifutuentes [they eat anything and fuck anything] ... they are the chosen people of debauchery and their systematic bestiality with ducks, goats, and other animals is equalled only by their pederasty.”⁷⁹

Still, if we limit the range to male homoerotic practices we find these quite widely attested in premodern India, Afghanistan, China, and Japan.⁸⁰ Romantic and sexual relations between men were represented in premodern Chinese law, literature, and visual arts, and to be the active partner in consensual homoerotic sex seems to have held few if any negative associations.⁸¹ In spite of the homoerotic traditions of the eastern regions they journeyed through, and in contrast with travelers and writers of later periods, medieval European travel writers did not offer any general condemnation of homosexual or other unnatural practices in those places. Eastern sexualities thus encompassed the licit and illicit according to medieval moral teaching, but most fell into the category of the natural as acts or tendencies from which procreation might result.

There *are* two clear references to vices against nature in our medieval travel sources, though neither of them can be with any certainty connected with same-sex acts between men. Marco Polo comments that the Buddhist people of Campçio (Zhangye) in Tangut punish with death men who have unnatural intercourse with women (*jeu con feme contre nature*).⁸² Given contemporary European teaching on vices against nature, this remark would seem to be approving. Simon of St. Quentin’s account of the Mongols, recorded in Vincent of Beauvais’s *Speculum historiale*, claims the Tartars “copulate with all beasts indiscriminately even as the Saracens do, for among them [that is, Saracens] the sin of sodomy always flourishes and is also

widespread among the Tartars [*omnibus pecudibus se indifferenter commiscent sicut et Saraceni, nam in illis semper viguit sodomie peccatum et in Tartaris est eciam diffusum*].”⁸³ It is not clear whether “sodomy” is here a specific term for bestiality or for all forms of vice against nature, perhaps including same-sex practices. What is more important is that the accusation is exceptional. Compared with Carpini, Andrew of Longjumeau, and Rubruck, Simon is far more censorious in his descriptions of the Mongols, perhaps as a result of ill treatment at their hands during his months of imprisonment in Tartar-controlled territory. It is interesting that others, such as Ricold of Monte Croce, who is generally severe in his account of the Mongols, pass up the chance to make use of the sodomy accusation.

Poggio’s account of Niccolò’s travels, moreover, asserts the total absence of male-male sexual habits among “Indians” (here, the people of outer India or the India beyond the Ganges, roughly corresponding to China and southeast Asia). Prostitutes, “everywhere at hand,” entice men with their myriad temptations “because the use of men is unknown among the Indians [*marium usus apud Indos ignotus*].”⁸⁴ No doubt Poggio Bracciolini, as a fifteenth-century Florentine intellectual and specialist in classical literature, knew all about such “use of men.”⁸⁵ The assertion of eastern homosexual nonexistence expresses a view directly opposite to that of modern Orientalists. The contrast between medieval and colonial-era depictions of Asian erotics is also illustrated via Niccolò’s account of Burmese men’s penis modifications. They had the skin of their penises cut and several small bells inserted to make their members larger and give their wives greater satisfaction: “The members of some men stretch way down between their legs so that when they walk they ring out and may be heard. Nicolò was mocked by the women because of his small penis and invited to do the same, but was not willing to give others pleasure through his pain.”⁸⁶ Some early modern travelers remarked on these “Burmese bells” too, but they employed the topos of eastern sodomy to explain their use. Around the turn of the seventeenth century Italian explorer Francesco Carletti wrote that people of Burma, “using an ancient invention designed by a queen to rule out and render impossible the practicing of venery in illicit parts of the body even with men,” ordered “rattles” the size of hazelnuts to be inserted in every man’s penis.⁸⁷ The bells’ utility in preventing homosexual acts was made more explicitly by the English ambassador Ralph Fitch in 1583: “They were inuented because they [husbands] should not abuse the male sexe. For in times past all those countries were so given to that villany, that they were very scarce of people.”⁸⁸

If we step aside from travel literature and consider later medieval European texts and contexts more broadly, we find sodomy allegations

(especially regarding male-male practices) often used for political defamation and to justify ideological, political, or military dominion. Sodomy defamation was widely used in medieval political conflicts between Christians (for example, to defame certain kings or popes and famously to denounce the Knights Templar) and in rivalry between regions (such as France and Italy). It also had utility in condemning heretics and non-Christians, especially Muslims in Iberia and the Holy Land. By the sixteenth century it was often used in colonial contexts, notably during the Spanish conquest of Mexico in the early sixteenth century.⁸⁹ Puff reminds us, “We have learned to recognize that sodomy is not only about sex. ... As a concept, it is often used to control the boundaries between the pure and impure, rights and wrongs, the indigenous and the foreign.”⁹⁰ Yet in the precolonial setting of medieval European journeys to central, east, south, and southeast Asia, the kinds of sodomy accusations one finds in these inflamed contexts are few indeed.

The sodomy allegation was an available device to late medieval authors, as is apparent in its frequent deployment against perceived political or religious foes within Europe or between Christendom and Islam. Its near absence from medieval travelers’ accounts of the Orient is still more notable when one considers its emergence in travel writing of the sixteenth century and later. Medieval authors paid the subject little attention because they lacked the motive to justify conquest and possession through assertion of unnatural practices that would establish Asian peoples as enemies of God.

Sexual Encounters

In further contrast to modern colonial perspectives, medieval travelers make very little mention of actual sexual contact with Asian people. This is no doubt partly because most of the extant sources were composed by Franciscan or Dominican friars who would be unlikely to record any sexual encounters even if they experienced them, but the traveling laymen do not tell us a great deal about their sexual or domestic habits either. Marco Polo spent his young adulthood in the East and it is difficult to imagine that he spent those years celibate. His comment that Tibet is a country to which “young gentlemen from sixteen years to 24 will do well to go” might imply personal experience, but there is no certainty that Polo went to Tibet and no guarantee that he bears authorial responsibility for this passage. Francesco Balducci Pegolotti’s advice that “if the merchant likes to take a woman with him from Tana, he can do so; if he does take one he will be kept much more comfortably [*di migliore condizione*] than if he does not take one” may have been alluding to sexual relief, but

equally some other sort of comforts could be implied.⁹¹ Given the strength of the Venetian slave trade in Tana it seems likely that a woman procured in Tana would have been a slave, but though she could have been Mongol she could equally have been Russian, Greek, Slavic, Turkish, Bosnian, or Circassian.⁹²

One clear indication of sexual contact between a medieval European and an Asian woman comes from Niccolò dei Conti, who told Pero Tafur that he had met and married a woman in “India” and had children with her but that they died of plague in Egypt on his return trip.⁹³ We have already noticed Niccolò telling how the women of Ava mocked him for his small penis, and we may add the tale of Ludovico’s travel companion who agreed to take the virginity of a young bride in Tenasserim.

On the whole, one would think that a good deal of sexual contact would have taken place between European men and Asian women given that large numbers of merchants made the journey east and some spent several years in trading stations abroad, but testimony is sparse. Travel narratives also lack any anxiety about cross-cultural or cross-religious miscegenation such as was so feared and reviled between Christians and Jews and Muslims.⁹⁴ This was no doubt partly because of the relative infrequency of sexual relations between Europeans and Asians but perhaps more likely because there was no need to build up phobic prohibitions based on exaggerated claims of cultural or religious Otherness. If taking sexual possession of local women is a synecdoche of colonizers’ possession of whole peoples and empires, the scarcity of such anecdotes in medieval travel literature is symptomatic of the authors’ precolonial outlooks.

Erotic Profusion and Looking with Pleasure

Let us try to pull some of these threads together. We have seen that travelers with more pragmatic agendas, notably those on ambassadorial missions to the Mongols, found room for less exotic habits such as tolerance for low-degree incest and capital punishment for adultery, but in books partly or entirely produced by authors who had not visited the East and that also had the widest circulation among European readerships, the five features identified by the *Imago* scribe dominate. In these, Asian cultures allow men sexual access to large numbers of willing women. It is true that one can also find accounts of sexual restraint, marital chastity, and even monogamy, but these are less frequent.⁹⁵ In addition, women of many parts of Asia are portrayed as autonomous sexual agents. While some descriptions, such as those of women held in common in Lamori, convey negative authorial judgment, often the lack of sexual

exclusivity in men's access to women is handled lightly and even playfully. The dominant image is one of intriguing erotic profusion.

Monogamy is, on the face of it, fundamental to Christian sexual ethics. Mark D. Jordan, in his book on same-sex unions, asks how and why the Christian tradition has come to valorize monogamy over other marital or sexual arrangements and remarks that polygamy has "been continuously imagined as a necessary boundary on the other side of which stood heretical Christians or nefarious non-Christians—including, in recent centuries, the 'pagans' or 'heathens' of missionary lands."⁹⁶ Indeed, considerable support for his thesis may be found among medieval commentaries on Islam, such as works by Gerald of Wales, Alain de Lille, Jacques de Vitry, and Vincent of Beauvais and in fictional biographies of Mohammed, which often included revilement of "Saracen" polygamy within their excoriations of the religion as ridden with fleshly vices and excesses.⁹⁷ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen explores how Christian authors reveled in "the superabundant wealth, plentiful luxuries, and hedonism of the Saracens" not only to condemn them but to express a complex *jouissance*, a tendency to find "Joie in the other." Cohen explores the potential for medieval literary formations of Islam to provide "a figure who consumes and hoards the enjoyment that 'we' as Westerners have renounced *in order to be Westerners*."⁹⁸ Polygamy sits alongside allegations of Muslim adultery, incest, concubinage, and sodomy to create a salacious vision of pagan debauchery that consoles and pleases Christian readers through its formation of boundaries between selves and others as much as it appalls them. The connection of religious perfidy with sexual excess may also have been on the minds of some readers of accounts of more distant Orients. This is likely to have been the case for readers of Latin versions of the *Divisament*, for example, where associations were made between idolatry and sexual vice. It is also likely to have been among the responses of readers of Mandeville's *Book*, which takes them on a journey first through encounters with Saracens in the Holy Land then deep into an ever more exotic distant East. Oriental sexual indulgence may have been viewed as a marker of religious infamy for pagan idolaters as much as for the infidels nearer at hand. Here we see an overflow of medieval attitudes from Islamic to pagan contexts that might well be read as a form of medieval Orientalism, and it would be artificial to exclude such an interpretation entirely.

Yet it is perhaps too easy to assume that medieval Christians' response to non-monogamous cultures would necessarily be to condemn them. For a convention that has become a definitive requirement of proper Christian marriage, the scriptural basis for the law of monogamy is exceedingly thin. It boils down to little other than metaphors of marriage as the making of "one flesh."⁹⁹ There is no

clear ban on polygyny stated anywhere in Scripture; indeed, the Old Testament is replete with it.¹⁰⁰ The principle comes not from Christianity's Judaic forebears but from its polytheistic counterparts in Hellenic and Roman societies. Christianity took the principle of one-man one-wife from Roman law along with numerous other pagan marital habits including betrothal, the requirement for consent, prohibition of underage marriage, exchange of rings, and use of dowries.¹⁰¹

Theologians from Augustine to Aquinas recognized the problem posed by the polygynous Israelites in composing a genealogy for Christian marriage.¹⁰² Polygyny and concubinage were common among pre-Christian Germanic tribes, Merovingians, and early Carolingians. Even after Christian conversion Frankish royalty and noblemen often kept concubines.¹⁰³ Medieval kings and noblemen, indeed, never gave up their mistresses. Canon lawyers of the twelfth century reasserted the ban on polygamy while trying to refine distinctions between concubinage and fornication.¹⁰⁴ The problem came into sharp focus with the Reformation when a number of prominent reformers made the case against monogamy, and even Luther suggested polygamy as a rational solution to the marital woes of Philip of Hesse and Henry VIII.¹⁰⁵ Thus the principle of monogamy is central to Christian marriage yet rests on weak foundations. While most readers of travel literature were probably unlikely to have pondered the theological arguments for and against monogamy, they nonetheless would have been familiar with more mundane practices such as keeping mistresses, visiting prostitutes, and engaging in casual extramarital sex.

When European travelers found varieties of non-monogamy in the East they were, in part, simply commenting on practices they actually witnessed, but more than that they emphasized these over others because non-monogamy intrigued them in ways that chastity, monogamy, and same-sex practices did not. Above all, male opportunity to engage sexually with multiple women both appalled and appealed to European readers. They offered an attractive legitimization of practices that were illicit yet not *wholly* abject within a European sexual framework. Polygamy, although it had great utility for authors looking to exploit imagery of difference between Christian and non-Christian, was not inevitably a “boundary” in conceiving Otherness because forms of polygamy or sexual plurality were not altogether alien to medieval Christians. Sodomy was more shocking, as an all-encompassing insult to God, but was hardly spoken of because most European authors were not looking for an “essential barrier” between themselves and oriental peoples.

Conclusion

Although critical notes are sounded in accounts of southeast Asian sexual cultures, it seems many European readers were not revolted or alienated by tales of oriental eroticism. Sodomy is the primary form of sexual abjection in medieval Christian thought and therefore in constructions of alterity. It helps mark the boundary between medieval Christians and non-Christians and its rarity, along with the lack of interest in the Orient as a location for sexual experimentation, is emblematic of the precolonial outlook.

To end the chapter, let us glance forward to some contrasting testimony of later centuries. In 1867 Captain Edward Sellon recalled his years stationed in India, boasting of his erotic adventures with local women, praising their special talents and allure:

They understand in perfection all the arts and wiles of love, are capable of gratifying any tastes, and in face and figure they are unsurpassed by any women in the world. ... It is impossible to describe the enjoyment I experienced in the arms of these sirens. I have had English, French, German and Polish women of all grades of society since, but never, never did they bear a comparison with those salacious, succulent hours of the Far East.¹⁰⁶

Around thirty years later Sir Hugh Clifford, a colonial administrator who fancied himself a scholar and penned books with such irresistible titles as *Studies in Brown Humanity*, characterized Malaya as a lair of both pleasure and danger:

The night had fallen,—the soft, fragrant, enervating, voluptuous night of the Malay Peninsula. ... The moonlight of Asia is typical of the glamour which will always hang about the rags of the East while our World lasts. Viewed at the right time, and seen in this deceptive light, all manner of things in themselves hopelessly evil and unlovely have the power to fascinate as far more attractive objects too often fail to do. ... The atmosphere is apt to destroy a man's ability to scale things accurately; it deprives him of his sense of proportion. ... She was a girl of seventeen or eighteen, strangely long of limb and lithe of figure for a Malay.¹⁰⁷

Sellon's East is a pornotopia of robust self-indulgence. Clifford's is rotten with sensuality. Sellon's enthusiastic couplings could be taken as emblematic of the first stage of the colonial erotic experience, when male administrators, traders, and military servicemen often traveled east as bachelors and made the most of available sexual opportunities. The Orient, says Said, was "a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe," and H. L. Wesseling agrees that "sexual pleasures of the East were one of the attractions of life overseas."¹⁰⁸ East-West hookups were acknowledged and even encouraged by French and English governments as a way of learning the local language: in French Indochina to take up with a local woman

was to enjoy a “recumbent dictionary.” Women were not the sole attraction, however; some men seized the opportunity for homoerotic encounters in south and southeast Asia as others did in Africa and the Middle East.¹⁰⁹

Colonists increasingly had to forgo such pleasures or pursue them more furtively as larger numbers of white women moved to the colonies in the later nineteenth century and a new emphasis on racial and sexual purity saw a dramatic reduction in concubinage and mixed marriages. Lands of the distant East came to be connected less with sexual opportunity than with decadence and danger.¹¹⁰ Clifford’s novel illustrates the latter. The arrival of the Englishman’s blond, bonny-cheeked wife draws the protagonist away from the seductive Malay girl, who wreaks her revenge by poisoning the wife in final confirmation of the moral turpitude of the East. Both strands in Europe’s sexual colonization of Asia are drawn together by Said’s image of the Orient as sensual, languid, fertile, and erotic—the alluring mistress desired and possessed by the cool, rational European master, or the effeminate who deserves subjection by men of empire: “[T]he Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies.”¹¹¹

When we turn back to medieval travel writing and find recurrent themes of polygamy, concubinage, female promiscuity, and sensual delights in several of our authors’ descriptions of the East, we may be tempted to backdate this strand in Orientalism to premodern thinking.¹¹² This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that although the polygamous erotic and marital regimes of Asian cultures have been a matter of enduring fascination for European audiences, we should pay more attention to historically specific formations of European views of Asian sex and sensuality. Before Orientalism, sensual stereotypes were regularly relayed for enjoyment as well as for disapproval, without an avaricious or opportunistic gaze.

Chapter 7

Civility

Little remains of Khubilai Khân's summer capital at Shangdu (Coleridge's Xanadu, Marco Polo's Ciandu) except some earthworks, the brick corners of long-crumbled towers, the bases and fallen capitals of pillars, and some glazed tile and marble fragments. William Dalrymple when visiting in 1986 described his view of the ruins of "Xanadu" as "nearer the heath scene in *Lear* than the exotic pleasure garden described by Polo."¹ The untutored observer will find little of the "stately pleasure-dome" that inspired Marco Polo's praise and Coleridge's opium-inspired hallucination. Coleridge's vision was interrupted by the knock of a "person from Porlock"; our latter-day imaginings are brought up short by the wreckage of conquest and time.

Polo's description of Khubilai Khân's palace and summer capital at Shangdu introduced medieval readers to the splendors of Cathay and its southern neighbor Manzi. Many parts of Europe were entering a new era of urbanization and ceremonial complexity from the thirteenth century. Elite urban and genteel readers were interested in reading about novel technologies, modes of communication, forms of currency, and social organization, as well as the size and design of urban centers and the higher forms of luxury and court ceremony. While reading about such things in the East, they were implementing more advanced modes of civility in the courts and cities of late medieval Europe. This is not to propose cause and effect; we need not identify obvious links between representations within travel writing and European social developments to suggest that they are interconnected. Rather, the presence of themes of civility and technology in accounts of the distant East is congruent with developments at home. Travelers' tales of China, particularly those that became most popular with readers, lingered over such descriptions because they were of great contemporary interest. This chapter takes a narrower focus than the preceding ones, largely leaving aside accounts of Mongolia, India, and southeast Asia to concentrate on China during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368).

“Civility” is chosen as the title of this chapter on travelers’ accounts of urban life and descriptions of palaces. The emphasis is therefore on what might be termed “public” rather than “private” or “personal” aspects of civility. *Civilis* and *civilitas* were words learned medieval authors knew from antiquity. John Gillingham notes their usage by Bede and Alcuin in the eighth century, and William of Malmesbury, John of Salisbury, Herbert of Bosham, and Gerald de Barri (Gerald of Wales) in the twelfth.² In antiquity the terms’ original derivation from *civis* (citizen) implied a set of values and behaviors explicitly associated with city-dwelling; however, as Gillingham shows, along with their counterpart *urbanitas* they were also used in high-medieval works to refer to refinement, good taste, self-restraint, and good lordship in feudal and clerical contexts. Thus the revival of “civility” in the sixteenth century, beginning with Erasmus’s highly influential *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* (1530), was not the marker of a paradigm shift in ideals of social conduct it has often been taken to be.³

William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris (1180/90–1249), referred to *civilitas romana* in the context of a broader metaphor of the city (*civitas*) as representative of perfected humanity in contrast with the wild forest (*silva*) or unworked stone (*lapides rudes*).⁴ The city is the place of men; the forest is the place of beasts. *Civilis* and *civilitas*, whether or not explicitly connected with cities, were accruing the associations that came to make up the now more familiar “civilization” that emerged in its current sense in the eighteenth century.

Chinese Cities: “None Greater in the World”

The eastern panels of the Catalan Atlas, c. 1380, strongly influenced by Marco Polo’s and Mandeville’s descriptions of the East, show Cathay as a realm of cities. The atlas’s depictions of central Asia and India emphasize marvels such as men using eagles to hunt for diamonds, a battle between pygmies and cranes, and a sword-wielding Amazonian queen. Taprobana features a splendid elephant and a mermaid swims in the waters of the East Indies, while to the east of Cathay dwell the ichthyophagi. Yet Cathay itself is dominated by cities, the greatest of them “Chambalech” (Cambaluc)—Khubilai’s capital and a precursor to modern Beijing.⁵ The splendors of a preindustrial urban China moved European observers to eulogies. When the Majorcan cartographic school responsible for the Catalan Atlas prepared to put their great work together, they took their cue from available narratives that portrayed China as gloriously urban.

Leaving aside Marco Polo for the moment, some of the earliest

praise for the great Khân and his realm came from the pens of Franciscan missionaries, such as John of Monte Corvino (who exclaimed that no “king or prince in the world can be compared to his majesty the Cham in respect of the extent of his dominions, the vastness of their population, or the amount of his wealth”⁶ and, with regard to the “Cham’s” empire, “I give you to know that there is none greater in the world”);⁷ Peregrine of Castello (“If I were to write an account of the state of this mighty empire—the greatness of its power, the size of its armies, the extent of its territory, the amount of its revenue and its expenditure of charitable relief—it would not be believed. The Latins here have compared it in these respects to all other king[doms] of the world, but I do not write how it surpasses them”);⁸ and Andrew of Perugia (“As to the wealth, splendour, and glory of this great emperor, the vastness of his dominion, the multitudes of people subject to him, the number and greatness of his cities, and the constitution of the empire within which no man dares to draw a sword against his neighbour, I will say nothing, because it would be a long matter to write, and would seem incredible to those who heard it”).⁹ Odoric writes of Manzi that it possesses two thousand great cities of such size that “neither Treviso nor Vicenza would be entitled to be numbered among them,”¹⁰ and his subsequent accounts of particular cities reiterate the theme climaxing with “Cansay” (Hangzhou), the “City of Heaven” (*civitas celi*), greatest in the world, stupendous in size and population, a hundred miles in circumference and with twelve thousand bridges across its myriad canals.¹¹ Mandeville follows Odoric in most of this.¹² Odoric also describes customs and institutions that seem familiar to us now but were truly marvelous to European observers:

there is a custom in this city that if any one desire to give a great dinner or entertainment to his friends he goes to one of the hostels which are established for this very purpose, and says to the host there: “Make me a dinner for such a number of my friends, and I propose to expend such a sum upon it.” Then the host does exactly as ordered, and the guests are better served than they would have been in the entertainer’s own house.¹³

Mandeville copies this almost word for word.¹⁴ Thus the humble restaurant is almost as worthy of wonder to our medieval observers as populations of dogheads.

This is not a Eurocentric but rather a Sinocentric vision of the world. “The Book of the Estate of the Great Caan” lauds the emperor as a supremely powerful king and tells of the vastness of the realm, the great variety of merchandise, and fine fabrics.¹⁵ Cathay “has several cities larger in size than Paris or Florence; and a great multitude of places full of inhabitants, and smaller cities past counting.”¹⁶ The two finest cities, Cambalec and “Cassay”

(Hangzhou), are “very great, and very famous,” each thirty miles in circumference and the populations so large that in Cambalec alone there are forty thousand soldiers to maintain order. Cassay is even larger as an important trading city to which merchants from all over the world come.¹⁷

Jordan Catala did not venture as far as China but appears to draw on other authors, perhaps Marco Polo, in praising the “Great Tartar” who rules over four regions “as large as the realm of France, and well peopled too.” The true size of the realm seems to have defeated Jordan’s imagination: “I have heard that the emperor has two hundred cities under him greater than Toulouse; and I certainly believe them to have more inhabitants.” Jordan has heard good things about the Chinese inhabitants of this empire, that they “be marvellously well-mannered, clean, courteous and also generous.”¹⁸ Yet in closing, Jordan makes Eurocentric remarks that are unusual in the context of the eastern travelers: “there is no better land, no more beautiful, no people so honest, no foodstuffs so good or savoury, no dress so handsome, or manners so noble, as here in our own Christendom; and, above all, we have the true faith, though it be ill-kept.”¹⁹

Hetoum is not known to have visited China either but that did not prevent him from praising Cathay as “the noblest and richest realm in the world,” its inhabitants enjoying a praiseworthy alphabet and language. He is intrigued that these people “who are so simple in their beliefs and things spiritual” can yet be so advanced in crafts and technology. Indeed, he says, the Cathayans say of themselves that they see with both eyes where all other peoples have but one. This commonplace is repeated by Mandeville and Poggio, among others.²⁰ Hetoum can see some point to the Cathayan perspective because many “strange and marvellous things, and of subtle craftsmanship” come out of Cathay and its people are the best artisans and craftsmen in the world. The men of the country are not strong warriors in arms, but by their ingenious war engines and forms of arms they have often defeated their enemies.

Marignolli asserts the emperor of the Tartars holds dominion over half the eastern world. His power, the wealth of his 30,000 cities, lands, languages and districts, and the size of the population exceed all telling: “And among the rest is that most famous city of Campsay, the finest, the biggest, the richest, the most populous, and altogether the most marvellous city, the city of the greatest wealth and luxury, of the most splendid buildings (especially idol temples, in some of which there are 1000 and 2000 monks dwelling together) that exists now upon the face of the earth, or perhaps that ever did exist.” Zaiton (Quanzhou), too, is “a wondrous fine seaport and a city of incredible size, where our Minor Friars have three very fine churches.”²¹

With the victory of the Ming dynasty in 1368 China became ill disposed to foreigners and there is no reliable record of any European visitor there between Marignolli (1338–53) and the early sixteenth century, but that did not stop the panegyrics. Niccolò, who sailed no farther north than Champa, praises Cathay as a province “superior to all others in the world,” with vast fortified cities in Cambalec and “Nemptai” (Hangzhou): “[I]n these two cities the houses and palaces and other ornaments are similar to those in Italy, and that the men are gentle, wise and more wealthy than any others.”²²

The foundational text on China’s splendors was Marco Polo’s *Divisament*, which devotes several chapters to Khubilai Khân’s greatness and the splendor of his realm.²³ His capital at Taidu or Cambaluc is twenty-four miles around, a perfect square with four walls of exactly six miles each, the walls ten paces thick at their bases and tapering to a top twenty paces high, with three great gates in each wall. The city is laid out in straight lines, the streets so wide and broad one can see from one end of them to the other, lined with beautiful palaces, inns, and houses all laid out in square plots as neat (according to some versions) as a chessboard. The city center is dominated by a large palace with a great clock or bell that sounds three times every night to mark the evening curfew, after which none but doctors and midwives may go about the streets until dawn, and a thousand guards watch over the night city.²⁴ Khubilai’s Cambaluc (from the Turkic name Khanbaliq: it was Dadu to the Chinese and Daidu to the Mongols) was a new city in 1267 when Khubilai moved the site of the northern capital across the river and started afresh, building a meticulously planned city along geometric lines. When Polo arrived in 1275 the city was still gleaming new, construction only having been completed the previous year. Hangzhou, though celebrated by many visitors including Polo as the greatest city in the world, departed from the ideal Chinese model of rigid and geometric planning: it was a traders’ city that had developed in a more organic way.²⁵ Still, its population, wealth, buildings, and bridges served more than well enough to impress European observers. Whether their impressions were based on observation, hearsay, or textual tradition, late medieval commentators on China unanimously emphasized its cities’ wealth and sophistication. Descriptions of beggars, hovels, dirt, sewage, cripples, and disease are altogether lacking.

Travel writers make so much of Chinese cities because later medieval civilization was enchanted by the idea of the metropolis. A number of historians have explored the city’s purchase on the medieval imagination.²⁶ European towns and cities admittedly took a long time to climb back from the low population levels and state of physical decay apparent in the centuries following the decline of the

western Roman Empire. Even by 1500 no medieval city had reached the size of Rome at its height, estimated variously at anywhere between 200,000 and one million inhabitants.²⁷ In le Goff's words, "the medieval town was not, at first sight, a frighteningly large monster."²⁸ The largest cities c. 1300, before the collapses wrought by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century famines and plagues, were Venice and Milan with around 100,000 inhabitants each, Paris with around 80,000, and Bruges, Ghent, Toulouse, London, Hamburg, and Lübeck with between 20,000 and 40,000.²⁹ The total population of western and central Europe c. 1340 was about 35.5 million and of all Europe (western, central, southern, and eastern) was around 73.5 million. In contrast, it is estimated that the population of Yuan-controlled China in the 1270s was around 65 million, with the most intensive concentration in and around the Song capital of Hangzhou, which is estimated to have housed around 1.5 million people within an eight-square-mile radius, making it the "world's most populous city" (according to Rossabi) of its day.³⁰ Marco Polo's estimate of 1.6 million ("1600 thousand") houses then appears an exaggeration, as each house would have contained several people, but it is not a bad attempt as medieval statistics go.³¹ It is not that China as a whole was more heavily populated than Europe; rather, some of its cities were dramatically larger. Most estimates put the proportions of the rural to urban populations of later medieval Europe at around 85:15, while in some regions as much as 95 percent of the population was rural.³²

Despite their small size relative to other cities globally and in other eras, and compared with the European countryside, from at least the twelfth century cities were regularly viewed with admiration, pleasure, and desire. Civic patriotism was renewed. Urban beauty and order were lauded, new towns were carefully planned, and old ones were "improved" with geometric principles that were seen as reflective of divine order. Towns and cities, at least ideally, could mirror the sacred geometry of the cosmos.³³

Some prominent monastic authors, to be sure, denounced the satanic perils of cities, as seen in works by Rupert of Deutz, Richard of Devizes, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Gervase of Tilbury in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³⁴ Le Goff traces both anti- and pro-urban Christian sentiment to the Old and New Testaments. In Genesis not only Cain's city but also Babel, Sodom, and Gomorrah stand for the worldly perils that cities embody. Beyond Genesis, however, the Old Testament grants cities a certain allure as the Hebrew people increasingly seek to conquer and inhabit them, while Jerusalem itself is elevated to the pinnacle of earthly settlement.³⁵ The New Testament continued to portray cities as representing both the darkest and loftiest aspects of human achievement, a theme encapsulated in the

contrast between Babylon and Jerusalem, perdition and salvation. Thus the garden of the original Paradise is replaced: “At the end of time mankind would come to reside for all eternity in a city. The vision of the eternal city, first introduced in Isaiah 54:11, becomes the culmination of the entire Bible.”³⁶ These contrasting allegorical images of heavenly and earthly cities recurred in Christian literature, notably Augustine’s *City of God* (c. 410–27) and Otto von Freising’s *Two Cities* (1146), while in Christian cartography the city of Jerusalem was often shown to mark the navel of the world.³⁷

Particular European cities were often exalted, beginning in the second quarter of the eighth century with an anonymous author’s verses on Milan.³⁸ Well-known examples include William Fitzstephen’s 1173 classically inspired eulogy to London, which extolled its location, climate, piety, gardens, nearby pastures, and forests with abundant game, freshwater springs, healthy, handsome, and well-mannered citizens, virtuous women, renowned schools, public order, cookery, entertainments, sports, and antiquity.³⁹ Mythical or historical cities, such as Troy, also received detailed and glowing descriptions in late medieval literary works.⁴⁰ Of particular interest, however, is Friar Bonvesin della Riva’s 1288 paean to Milan, named by J. K. Hyde as “the definitive form of the medieval urban description.”⁴¹ We have seen that Milan was, along with Venice, one of the most populated cities of thirteenth-century Europe. At the time that Bonvesin (of the Umiliati order) produced his work, Venetian-born Marco Polo was still resident in Khubilai’s Cathay. It is unsurprising that Polo, scion of a mercantile family and native of one of the greatest cities in Europe, should see fit to extol cities. Friar Bonvesin’s eulogy might seem more unexpected given the monastic tradition of anti-urban sentiment, but it makes sense when one remembers that the Umiliati made their homes in towns.⁴² Their respective descriptions of Taidu/Cambaluc and Milan, their suburbs and regions, show numerous similarities, as demonstrated in Table 1.

It is apparent that though there are a number of points of difference between the cities indicative of specific cultural practices and institutions (notably, the friar’s emphasis on the large numbers of religious houses and vowed clergy in Milan and its region, and his obsession with statistics throughout), there are more points of similarity than difference. One text has not served as the basis or inspiration for the other—the similarities are not so close as to suggest overt intertextuality; rather, in late thirteenth-century northern Italy authors from its two greatest cities, Milan and Venice, became enthusiastic about the same kinds of urban qualities. Architectural impact, population size, orderly layout, strong governance, expansion into suburbs and hinterlands, and commercial prosperity were the

most impressive aspects of the great cities of the world. Yet it seems that Polo's account might make Cambaluc seem more similar to a European city than it actually was, as he fails to mention the distinctively Mongol elements, such as the tents erected in the Imperial Parks that were the home of Khubilai's sons and nephews and site of childbirth for his wives.⁴³

Polo's Cambaluc and Bonvesin's Milan demonstrate our recurring theme of European travelers' fascination with the familiar as an aspect of their encounter with distant Easts. Cambaluc and Milan are not the same, but they have a tremendous amount in common. Note the palaces of government that stand proudly within the city walls, each with its bell tower. The role of municipal clocks and bells in reshaping concepts of time in European cities from the late twelfth century have been explored by le Goff, who also calls the accompanying shift in mentalities the most spectacular revolution in later medieval thought.⁴⁴ When Marco Polo traveled the length of the known world to a great city almost unimaginably remote from the context of his youth, he found a civilization as preoccupied with orderliness and civic organization—including timekeeping—as the cities he had left behind.

To extend the analysis, let us consider the implications of le Goff's study of urban representations in twelfth-century French literary works of Christian conflict with the Muslim south. Most interesting are his readings of the two chansons de geste on William of Orange: *Le Charroi de Nîmes* and *La Prise d'Orange*. William (c. 750/55–c. 812), Count of Toulouse and a grandson of Charles Martel and cousin of Charlemagne, achieved renown for battles against Saracens. In the chansons de geste that celebrated those Christian conquests, cities were included among the prizes awarded to crusaders alongside land, castles, abbeys, markets, and archbishoprics: "A city is pleasant to look at and better still to capture. It is a handsome prey, a desirable prize."⁴⁵ In *La Prise d'Orange* an implicit equation is drawn between the attractions of Orange, a city held by the Saracen king Tibaut and his luscious wife, Lady Orable: "If only you could see the palace of the city, entirely made of vaults and decorated with mosaics! ... Inside is Queen Orable, wife of King Tibaut of Africa. No equal beauty exists in any pagan land. Her neck is elegant. She is thin and slender. Her skin is as white as the hawthorn blossom. Her eyes are brilliant and clear and always laughing."⁴⁶ The chanson concludes with William's conquest of both Orange and Orable, capturing the city and converting and marrying its queen: "*La Prise d'Orange* is the story of the gratification of a double desire: to seize both a woman and a city"; Orable's "beautiful slender body is not just comparable to the tall towers of the city but is the very incarnation of the city's desirability.

For these warriors the city is a woman.”⁴⁷

<i>Marco Polo's Taidu/Cambaluc, c. 1298^a</i>	<i>Bonvesin della Riva's Milan, 1288^b</i>
Twenty-four miles around	[Different manuscripts give various dimensions]
Exactly square	Exactly round (circular shape a mark of city's perfection)
Thick, high walls, embattled, white	[Descriptions of walls in other manuscripts]
Twelve gates (three in each wall)	Six strong main gates, ten secondary gates
Five large, beautiful palaces on each wall (above gates and on corners)	
Halls within palaces for armed guard	
Straight, wide streets	Wide streets
Many beautiful palaces within city	Beautiful palaces
Many beautiful inns	
Many beautiful houses	Many houses, not too crowded
Central city palace with town clock and bell	Palace of the Commune, with courtyard and bell tower
Night curfew	
Large armed guard at each gate	
Extensive suburbs	Extensive suburbs
Large suburban population—more than in city	Large regional population—as numerous as in the city
Lodging houses in suburbs for visiting merchants	Approximately 150 hostelries for strangers
Suburban houses and palaces as beautiful as those in town (excepting Khân's)	
Bodies buried/burned beyond suburbs	
Many prostitutes in suburbs	
Great abundance of people	Largest city population “in the world”: 200,000 plus 10,000 religious; 700,000 in region
Great trade in precious goods and produce in city; major trading center for region	300 commercial bakeries; more than 1,000 monastic bakeries; more than 1,000 shopkeepers; more than 440 butchers; more than 18 fishermen; regular fairs, markets, innumerable merchants
Hinterland—more than 200 villages	Hinterland—150 villages with castles
City mint; manufacture of paper money	
Twelve ruling barons dwelling in city palace	
Judge and scribes appointed to assist each baron	120 lawyers; 1,500 notaries
Barons order troop movements	40,000 warriors
Roads leading out from city to each province	
Well-appointed staging posts along roads	
Messenger system with bells and plenty of horses	600 messengers; 6 trumpeters; multitude of blacksmiths, saddlers, makers of brass bells for horses
Corn stores for charity	
Trees planted along roadsides	
Rice wine	
Use of coal	
[Z and R versions include description of Cambaluc's diviners and astrologers]	200 sanctuaries of saints; 480 altars
[Z and R versions include accounts of Cathayan religious practices—“idolatry”]	36 churches in city; more than 260 in region
	120 steeples in city
[Z manuscript includes description of Cathayans as well-mannered, scholarly, well-	inhabitants: tall, jovial, friendly, honest, decent, orderly, well-dressed, open-handed,

spoken, cheerful, possessing good table manners, respectful of parents, though previously addicted to gambling and cheating]	good-humored in customs and way of life
	10 canonries in city (approximately 98 in region); 94 chapels, 6 monasteries; 8 nunneries (plus long list of other monasteries and friaries); 10 hospitals; 115 parishes
	28 physicians; more than 150 surgeons
	8 grammar teachers; 14 teachers of chant; more than 70 teachers of basic literacy; 40 copyists
Later chapters 105–11, on regions and provinces of Cathay, include regular mention of fertility, gardens, produce, and so on. ^c	Description of the abundant grain, pulses, fruits, nuts, meat, fish, salt, hay, and firewood produced in the region and consumed in the city

^aMarco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 85, 95–104 (Ronchi, 419–21, 437–50; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 212–13, 235–55).

^bBonvesin, “De Magnalibus Urbis Mediolani,” 61–69.

^cMarco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 105–11 (Ronchi, 450–58; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 255–64).

Chinese cities, in clear contrast, are not feminized. They are not objects of desire or sought as Christian conquests. In travel writing the cities existed unto themselves; distant yet familiar, admirable yet recognizable. The European readers of Marco Polo’s, Odoric’s, or Hetoum’s travelogues (to name only those that received wide readerships) do not seem to have felt challenged by regular assertions of their superiority in size, populace, and magnificence to the cities of Christendom. The only author to have ventured a Eurocentric opinion, Jordan, was not widely read.

If building vast cities is definitive of civility in travelers’ tales of the East, Ricold’s account of the Mongols makes it clear that nomadism and disdain for cities demonstrate barbarism.

Entering Turkey we encounter the horrible and monstrous people of the Tartars. The Tartars are different from all other peoples of the world, in their appearance, in customs and in rites. ... they have no courtesy [*curialitatem*], nor shame [*uerecundiam*], nor gratitude [*gratitudinem*], nor love for a particular place as other peoples do. But they seem to hate all cities and all home dwellings. For they destroy almost all cities and fortresses and all houses and buildings. And the more one humbles oneself before them, the worse they do to you.⁴⁸

Rubruck had earlier said of the Mongols that nowhere have they any “lasting city” and of the “one to come” they have no knowledge.⁴⁹ His allusion to heaven as a city is revealing of contemporary bias in favor of the urban. Although “struck with awe” on first glimpsing Batu’s camp, he found that Karakorum apart from Batu’s palace “is not as fine as the town of St Denis, and the monastery of St Denis is worth ten of the palace.”⁵⁰ Hetoum’s history of the Tartars similarly remarks that prior to Chinggis’s rise to dominance they dwelled “as beastly men, who have neither faith nor law, but went from place to place

like roaming beasts [*come homes bestiaus, qui n'avoient ne foi ne loi; de luec en luec aloient [comme] bestes paissanz*]," but the implication is that they have since moved beyond that primitive phase.⁵¹ Under Khubilai, the Tartars are much altered. Hetoum gives him credit for making his capital in Khanbaliq "that is greater than Rome."⁵² Polo's book also displays elements of the dualist mentality of "barbaric" and "civilized," as John Critchley shows in his examination of the *Divisament's* use of *domesche*, in its earliest Franco-Italian versions. One might translate the word as "domesticated," though "civilized" is nearer the original intention. *Domesche* peoples and places stand in contrast with the "sauvage," "bestiaus," or people "come bestes."⁵³

The urban prejudice against rural, sylvan, or nomadic folk is one of the most enduring tropes of European cultural discourse. As previously discussed, ancient Greek and Roman biases against "barbarian" peoples were passed into medieval thought. By the thirteenth century Mongols had to an extent taken on the venerable mantle of the barbarian.⁵⁴ Medieval travelers' texts express the opposition between the civilized and the wild that pervaded many medieval authors' work. Le Goff has explored the multifaceted medieval views of the "wilderness." On the one hand, prevailing particularly during (though not exclusive to) the early Christian era, we find the "desert" (*solitudo* or *eremus*, an undeveloped and unpopulated place) as the most fitting setting for contemplation, a spiritual refuge from the demands and cares of the world or city. In southern and eastern regions this desert was generally the treeless wasteland we now understand by the term, while in the north and west of Europe it was more usually a forest. Hermits and anchorites thus made their way to deserts, islands, and forests, dependent on their geographic location, to escape the distractions of worldly living. On the other hand, forests in particular were associated with the uncouth, the savage, indeed the dangerous. "Wild men" of medieval literature and art dwelled in forests, wore animal skins, were covered in hair, and ate raw meat rather than bread. In medieval culture the great contract was "between nature and culture, expressed in terms of the opposition between what was built, cultivated, and inhabited (city, castle, village) and what was essentially wild (the ocean and forest, the western equivalents of the great desert), that is, between men who lived in groups and those who lived in solitude."⁵⁵ In partial modification of le Goff's generalization, however, it seems that what European observers of Asian cultures objected to was not living in solitude so much as nomadism and contempt for permanent settlements.

Was there any educative component to travelers' descriptions of Chinese civilizations? Did readers look to travelers' accounts of the

advanced civilizations of the far East for lessons on urban design, governance, architectural style, or social cohesion? It would be difficult to draw this conclusion to any great extent. As seen, many of the qualities admired in Chinese cities matched elements already praised in European ones. However, there may be clues in the passages from Polo's *Divisament* where the text goes off on a tangent in order to describe noteworthy phenomena in detail. Between the beginning of the *Divisament's* account of Cambaluc and its end (chapters 85 to 104 in major modern editions) we can see a number of such substantial digressions: on the Khân's splendid dining habits and keeping of festivals; on his hunting parties; on the manufacture and use of paper money; and on his provision of grain to his subjects in times of dearth. The last of these was addressed in [Chapter 4](#) and feasting appears later in the chapter, so let us pause for a moment on the subjects of paper money and the messenger service.

The *Divisament* relates in close detail how men take the white inner bark of the mulberry tree and from them form sheets like paper, but black, cut to different sizes depending on value and sealed with the Khân's great seal.⁵⁶ All payments in the kingdom must be made with this money. Moreover, merchants who travel to the Khân's kingdom with pearls, precious stones, gold, silver, cloth of gold, or silk also accept paper money for their goods because they know they can exchange it easily for any goods they wish to buy in the kingdom. The bills have the advantage of lightness—one that is worth ten *bezants* of gold does not weigh even as much as one coin—and of renewability as when bills begin to get worn out they can be taken to the mint and exchanged for new. Hetoum, "The Book of the Estate of the Great Caan," and Mandeville also describe paper money.⁵⁷ The *Divisament* emphasizes the convenience of paper money but also its benefits for the Khân's wealth. At regular intervals he orders everyone in the kingdom who has precious pearls, stones, or metal in their possession to bring them to his officials, who then buy them with the money; moreover, no one is paid wages in anything but paper bills. Thus the Khân makes himself the richest lord on earth by gathering all available treasure while monopolizing the production of its paper substitute. For Khubilai and his successors, money really did grow on trees.

Before c. 1330 the currencies of medieval Europe were generally made from silver mined in central and eastern Europe, though gold also circulated in Mediterranean regions and was certainly used in thirteenth-century Florence, Genoa, and Venice. Silver coin was abundant in later thirteenth-century Europe, so much that gold increased markedly in comparative value in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.⁵⁸ The "bullion famines" often associated

with the later medieval period (c. 1395–1415 and c. 1440–60) were far in the future.⁵⁹ Paper banknotes were not used in Europe until the 1660s. However, by the later thirteenth century merchants involved in long-distance trade, along with others involved in transporting money over long distances such as papal officials, frequently used bills of exchange to obviate the need to carry large quantities of coin, which were heavy and easy prey for robbers. Other contemporary innovations included systems of credit, early forms of “checks,” and other benefits brought by the spread of international banking houses.⁶⁰ In addition, the wear on coins reduced their weight and value over time, which may help explain Polo’s fascination with the ease of exchanging old paper bills for new ones.⁶¹ The Polos and their ilk would not see paper money in Europe in their lifetimes or for many subsequent generations, but they were interested in innovations in money and technologies of credit and debit. It is not surprising that the Yuan system of paper money intrigued them.

The Great Khân’s courier system impressed Polo even more: “This is quite the greatest pride and the greatest grandeur that any emperor has or might ever have, nor any king nor any other earthly man.”⁶² Large staging posts are found on roads throughout the kingdom at twenty-five- or thirty-mile intervals, each provided with four hundred horses (half of which are on duty at any given time while the other half are at pasture), so that messengers and ambassadors may travel at speed and convenience throughout the kingdom at any day or night in a relay system that allows for uninterrupted transfer of news and information. If a river or lake stands in the way, boats are also kept ready. By such means a pair of messengers, their bodies bound up tightly and cloths wrapped around their heads, taking fresh horses at each station, may ride continually and cover 250 miles in a day, traveling even at night if needed with runners ahead bearing lights. At the lower level of the system are foot messengers dwelling in small settlements between the great staging posts at three-mile intervals. These men tie bells around their waists so that as they draw near the next village their approach can be heard, and the next messenger can ready himself to take over for a further three miles. By means of this relay a message can be taken without stopping by day or night to its final destination: thus a journey that would normally take a single party more than ten days to complete takes only two days and nights. Again, the “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan,” Odoric, and Mandeville give similar descriptions.⁶³

Medieval readers, especially those from the merchant ranks who made up an important part of Marco Polo’s readership, understood the problem of long-distance communications. As merchants increasingly carried out trade at a distance with the help of factors or agents in the

employ of the company it was essential to be able to maintain communications by means of couriers. They appear from around the 1260s in trade between the cities of Tuscany and the fairs of Champagne and became more numerous and better organized by the mid-fourteenth century. Peter Spufford notes that in 1357 a number of Florentine merchant companies banded together to organize a common courier service, no doubt to save on costs and create greater efficiencies: “That so many courier services developed in the later Middle Ages indicates how much the Italian business communities valued them.”⁶⁴ Italian companies in the fourteenth century were thus able to gain an advantage over their competitors elsewhere in Europe, with superior knowledge of market demand and supply available at relatively short notice. Religious orders, state bureaucracies, and the papacy also saw the benefits of fast pan-European communications. Contemporary accounts of distances traveled suggest around 50 kilometers per day was possible in Italy, while in France the generally flatter terrain allowed around 60 kilometers a day while super-fast speeds of around 150 kilometers a day might be achieved under pressure (as Buonaccorso Pitti claimed he had once managed while fighting for the French king).⁶⁵ Such speeds indicate that the *Divisament’s* claim that Yuan couriers could cover 250 miles (402 kilometers) in a day and night might need to be taken with a pinch of salt. It is clear, however, that organizations in late medieval Europe were alert to the importance of high-speed communications and looking for ways to improve their methods.

For any mercantile reader of medieval travel books on the East, descriptions of Chinese cities contained an abundance of valuable material. Practical information on postal systems and currencies added intriguing detail to the relatively standard *encomia* of cities that readers had become familiar with in contemporary writing on their own urban scenes. This vision of the East was not one of the exotic or marvels in the sense of something far beyond the realm of experience, but rather of an idealized realm. Late medieval readers found much to take pleasure in, and perhaps much to learn from, but what is perhaps most interesting about these precolonial images of Chinese cities is that they are almost entirely free from Eurocentrism. In addition, there is no sign of implied criticism of “home” by comparison with foreign advancement. Late medieval readers were capable of calmly enjoying the notion of Cathayan and Manzian cities as being similar, yet also superior, to the best Europe had to offer.

Palaces

Coleridge’s vision of “Kubla Khan’s pleasure-dome” was ostensibly

taken from Polo's account of Khubilai Khân's "Ciandu." Located three days' ride from his hunting grounds, this vast palace was said to be constructed of marble and other attractive stone with gilded rooms.⁶⁶ A walled enclosure some sixteen miles around contains fountains, rivers, lawns, and all manner of beasts the Khân keeps for hunting, as well as a great hunting lodge or second palace made of gilded canes that could be put up and taken down at short notice. Khubilai spends the summer months in Ciandu's relative cool. Yet the romantic Xanadu bears more in common with Polo's account of Khubilai's chief palace (Ta-ming Tien) at his capital, Cambaluc. Surrounded by thick, long, high walls, topped by battlements and its towers filled with armaments, the palace is the greatest ever seen.⁶⁷ Laid out on one level, its interior walls are covered with gold and silver and paintings of dragons, beasts, birds, and knights, and the ceiling is of gold and adorned with paintings. The vastness of the hall is incredible, with space to feed more than six thousand men. The glazed roofs outside are of red, green, yellow, and all colors, as bright and shining as crystal, yet extremely durable. The grounds within contain lawns and fruit trees and all manner of beautiful deer and other creatures. A deep lake is filled with fish, and through it flows a great river which, in the Ramusio text, in a line reminiscent of Coleridge, passes out of the lake and "fills another very great and deep hollow ... [it] departs from the other side of the lake and runs away."⁶⁸ Nearby the Green Hill is planted with every variety of beautiful tree and set with azure stones, so that nothing but green may be seen, and atop the hill is another great palace, this one green within and without. It is the Khân's palace at Cambaluc, more than that at Ciandu, that would seem to have inspired Coleridge's opiate-induced vision of the sublime.

Odoric also speaks of the Khân's palace (*palatium*) at Khanbaliq. Its walls, four miles in circumference, enclose a palace built on a well-wooded artificial hill beside a man-made lake with multitudes of geese, ducks, and swans, convenient for the lord's sport. They contain thickets filled with wild animals to enable the Khân to hunt without having to leave his domain. The vast and splendid palace itself contains golden columns and the walls are hung with fine skins of red leather, and in the midst of the palace is a giant jade jar, two meters in height, hung all around with gold and pearls. Golden mechanical peacocks flap their wings in response to clapped hands, which "must be done either by some diabolic art, or by some engine underground."⁶⁹ Odoric describes the formal and elaborate dining ceremonies of the court and the emperor's practice of traveling in great style from one residence to another with a huge retinue and all his wives and heirs.⁷⁰ Odoric is impressed by the Khân's hunting

parties and the four great feasts he keeps every year, especially by the lavish costumes of the noble attendants and their almost absurd rituals: “When the hour and conjunction waited for by the philosophers arrives, one of them calls out with a loud voice saying: ‘Prostrate yourselves before the emperor our mighty lord!’ And immediately all the barons touch the ground three times with their heads. Then he will call out again: ‘Rise all of you!’ and immediately they get up again. And then they wait for another auspicious moment, and when it comes he will shout out again: ‘Put your fingers in your ears!’ and so they do. And then: ‘Take them out’: and they obey.” And so on. Odoric is gently scathing about the music (“they all begin to play on their instruments of every kind, with such a clamor of music and song that it is enough to stun you”), though more complimentary about “certain singing women who sing so sweetly that it is quite delightful to listen to them.” Extravagant gifts are presented, dazzling jugglers perform, and all manner of entertainments ensue such that “must seem incredible to those who have not witnessed it.”⁷¹ Mandeville, as we should expect by now, follows Odoric in devoting several pages to describing the splendid palace, though his addition of precious stones to the palace architecture probably owes its inspiration to *The Letter of Prester John*.⁷² He undercuts the overall portrayal of Mongol courtly splendor by interposing some comments taken from Carpini about the “commons” simply laying their food on their knees to eat, without any napkin, and eating all manner of meat but not bread. When they have finished they wipe their dirty hands on their knees, and they eat only once a day.⁷³ However, he returns to closely following Odoric in describing the four great feasts kept by the Khân each year, as well as the pageantry surrounding them.⁷⁴



Figure 5. The palace of the Great Khân. Marco Polo, *Livre des merveilles du monde*. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 2810, c. 1410. Photo credit: bpk, Berlin / Gérard Le Gall / Art Resource, NY.

The Letter of Prester John laid the foundations, so to speak, for European travelers' accounts of the dazzling palaces of eastern potentates. The anonymous author seems to draw on the description of the Heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation (21:10–21) in its description of the precious gems and metals, though Prester John's palace is described in far greater detail.⁷⁵ The Apocalypse was a well-known theme in later medieval art and literature across western Europe.⁷⁶ Romance fiction had also, by the time of the *Letter's* composition, begun to include details of magnificent palaces. Benoît de Saint-Maure's *Roman de Troie* (c. 1160), for example, included a *chamber de beauté* with four pillars—one amber, one jasper, one onyx, and one "gagaret."⁷⁷ It is said that Prester John's palace is built according to the pattern "which the apostle Thomas ordered for King Gundoforo," resembling that mythical ancient edifice in all its features.⁷⁸ It has ceilings, pillars, and architraves of rare wood, an ebony roof for the deterrence of fire, two great golden apples (*duo poma aurea*), each set with a great carbuncle "so that the gold may shine by day and the carbuncles glimmer at night." The gates are of sardonyx inlaid with snakes' horn to repel poisonous things; others are ebony. The windows are crystal; the tables at which the courtiers eat are gold or amethyst and the pillars that support them are ebony; the pavement before the palace is onyx, which has the virtue of fostering the courage of the combatants who compete thereon; inside the palace no artificial light is needed because it is supplied by balsam; and the Prester's own

chamber is of gold and precious stones of every kind and his bed is of sapphire to ward off lust. Every month seven kings serve him, as well as sixty-two dukes, 365 counts at his table, and others with various court duties. Twelve archbishops and twenty bishops eat each day at his table along with greater ecclesiastics. His chief officers of the household (like Prester himself) possess both ecclesiastical and secular powers: his steward is a primate and a king, his cupbearer an archbishop and king; his marshal a king and superior abbot; and even his chief cook is both a king and an abbot. Later versions of the *Letter* endow Prester John with yet another palace, of even greater height and beauty, similarly constructed of gold, crystal, sapphires, topazes, and so on, which has miraculous powers to make those who enter hungry feel as though they have eaten their full, to make the sick well, and to prevent those on the point of death from dying.

The Book of John Mandeville presents a description of the palace of Prester John close to the *Letter's* original version,⁷⁹ and Witte devotes around one-quarter of his whole work to describing Prester John's vast palace, according to Westrem's calculations.⁸⁰ Witte guides the reader from one elaborate room to another, each lavishly furnished and containing not only precious gems but technologically impressive items such as a clock that doubles as an alarm system, a model of the solar system, and a marvelous mirror that sharpens the vision, perception, and discernment of the worthy scholars selected to gaze into it. Its architecture is also assuredly Christian, with numerous chapels and a great church within its walls, apartments named for the Holy Virgins, Holy Martyrs and Confessors, Holy Apostles, Holy Virgin Mary and the Angels, and the Holy Trinity, carvings in precious stone and gold of angels, patriarchs, apostles, martyrs, confessors, the Three Kings, virgins, and Christ in Judgment, and three priceless crosses by Prester John's bed.

We therefore have two main models of the oriental palace in travel narratives: one (from the books of Marco Polo and Odoric of Pordenone) that is based on observations of the Khân's chief residences and attempts a degree of *verité*; the other (originating in *The Letter of Prester John* and developed in Witte's fictional travelogue) apparently taking its cue from Revelation but also drawing on real medieval developments in household organization and staffing. Mandeville, working with copies of Odoric and *The Letter of Prester John* open in front of him, managed to synthesize the two.

The non-militaristic purposes and associations attached to castles in medieval culture have begun to receive attention.⁸¹ The structures described in eastern contexts, however, are not "castles" (*castri*); the word consistently used is "palace" (*palatium*). The defensive aspect of castles and attendant scholarly debates over the character of castle

compared with palace architecture (military or domestic) are in this instance expendable.⁸² Such great houses became increasingly luxurious pleasure-grounds during the later Middle Ages.⁸³ Joachim Bumke emphasizes this point, quoting from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*: "Today the grey ruins of the Hohenstaufen castles give no hint of the splendour that once radiated from them and which the poets captured in their verses: 'Then he saw a castle—ah! With what splendour did it shine!'"⁸⁴ The emphasis was on sparkle, rounded shapes, decoration, and color. The interiors of fictional palaces featured tapestries, wall paintings, silken hangings, plump cushions, and technical innovations such as plumbing for running water, even if the true castles of the twelfth century were rather less comfortable.⁸⁵ Food, drink, and elaborate feasting are dwelt upon by poets and didactic writers and are detailed in household accounts. Sharp distinctions were drawn between the food and drink served to noblemen and peasants, great attention was paid to hierarchies of seating and the proper way to serve at table, and even as early as the twelfth century personal table manners also received detailed attention.⁸⁶ "Feasting" covered a wider spectrum of activities than eating; it derives from the Latin *festum* and in early usage applied particularly to feast days of the liturgical year, though secular or political occasions came also to be celebrated with "feasts" (such as weddings, coronations, dubbing to knighthood, and peace treaties).

Malcolm Vale's study of courtly cultures in northwestern Europe (England, France, and parts of the Low Countries) between 1270 and 1380 helps us begin to gain an insight into contemporary fascination for luxury and ceremony. He warns against viewing late medieval courtly culture as mere "theater" or "pageantry," as these terms may imply a rather shallow intention to enact displays of wealth and power "devoid of inner meaning and significance."⁸⁷ Recent scholarship on palace architecture in Renaissance Italy supports the view that material magnificence was taken seriously in later medieval Europe. James R. Lindow's study of palaces in Florence, for example, considers Renaissance architecture in light of humanist theories of "magnificence" and "splendor" (the former technically applying to building, spectacle, and gifts, the latter to the interior of the household, person, furnishings, and display of things, although Renaissance authors did not always keep to this distinction).⁸⁸ Theories of *magnificentia* were employed by rulers and propagandists in Milan, Ferrara, Bologna, and Florence, among other cities, to justify building projects and lavish expenditure.⁸⁹ In the fifteenth century Florentine families including the Rucellai, Medici, Strozzi, and Gondi drew on ancient authorities to claim public good in the construction of grand new or renewed palaces (although not without criticism), while

contemporary fascination with secular architecture is demonstrated by the publication of Leon Battista Alberti's *Decem libri de re aedificatoria* (c. 1443–52).⁹⁰ The honor that magnificent private architecture endowed upon cities was relatively easy to claim; more difficult was to extend the rationale to splendid palace interiors, but Alberti and other contemporaries did so by emphasizing the rich man's duty to provide fine hospitality to his guests.⁹¹ Thus Christian discomfort with personal wealth's extravagant display for lay purposes was allayed by recourse to classical authorities and appeal to notions of civic honor and public good. It is worth noting that Marco Polo's *Divisament* frequently appeared in the inventories of well- to-do Florentine citizens of the fifteenth century,⁹² suggesting an overlap of interests between those reading of the wonders of eastern civilizations and those keen to develop a magnificent material culture in contemporary Florence.

Medieval readers of travelers' accounts of splendid architecture, sophisticated styles of living, and extravagant domestic rituals would have perceived more than surface gloss and glamour in these descriptions. These are not medieval equivalents of oriental "lifestyles of the rich and famous." The luxury and sophistication described stand for spiritual as well as worldly preeminence. Medieval readers would have been equally familiar with the notion of luxury as magnificent and in some ways a force for good and with the view of it as a sign of moral and spiritual corruption. In portrayals of the East, self-restraint or abnegation was not portrayed as requisite for good lordship: in Polo's book no such expectation is placed upon Khubilai.

The detail with which Marco Polo describes the dining arrangements at the court in Cambaluc may seem excessive to a modern reader. However, when we compare it with late medieval prescriptions for the serving of a lord at his table we see that he merely reflected or slightly anticipated a theme that would become a late medieval preoccupation.⁹³ First he describes the seating arrangements of the hall, "the table of the great lord very high above the others" and set in the north part of the hall, his first wife beside him on his left and his sons and grandsons lower and to the right. The remainder of his kinsfolk and barons and all other peoples are arranged at tables lower according to rank, with wives of his sons, grandsons, kindred, and barons regularly on the left. The Khân is able to see all the tables and feasters arrayed there. Outside the hall are still more chambers set with tables for numerous householders and guests. At the center of the hall is a huge gold pitcher containing a large butt or six barrels' worth of wine, and two men or ladies between them share a cup of wine so large it would be enough for eight or ten men. Polo is at pains to emphasize the quality and

quantity of gold and silver vessels and of the wine.

The barons appointed to serve are of high rank and tie silk kerchiefs over their mouths and noses to avoid breathing on and tainting the emperor's food or drink. All the servitors kneel as he drinks and a vast number of musicians play until he has finished his draught. Polo declines to describe the kinds of foods served and asks merely that the reader believe that a great quantity of every kind of food is available. He reiterates that women (or rather the first wives of the men present) dine in the hall also, seated with other ladies. Musicians, jugglers, acrobats, and all manner of entertainers perform for the lord once the meal is finished, and all laugh and enjoy it very much.

It may seem that Marco Polo's early readers may have been unfamiliar with this level of domestic ceremonial. The best accounts of household rituals among the medieval elites come from the mid- and late fifteenth century: in particular from the Burgundian court but with some remarkable exemplars from late fifteenth-century England, too.⁹⁴ However, Malcolm Vale warns his readers not to be misled by the apparent paucity of earlier evidence and directs attention to the Castilian *Siete partidas* of Alfonso the Wise in 1284, *Leges palatinae* of James I of Majorca of 1337, a household *Ordinatio* of the Dauphin Humbert de Vienne while traveling in 1336, and some other suggestive pre-fifteenth-century sources.⁹⁵ Joachim Bumke is prominent among medievalists who have pointed to literary sources such as Arthurian romances for descriptions of courtly conduct at feasts, and though Vale demurs that literary, didactic, and narrative sources may be misleading to the historian looking for evidence of actual behavior, we may take it as indicative of what medieval readers associated with aristocratic conduct.⁹⁶

The fifteenth-century Burgundian court turned aristocratic ritual into an art form. Even the most mundane daily routines came to be treated with elaborate ceremony, to the point that they almost seem to come close to sacred ceremony.⁹⁷ Particular attention was paid to the person of the duke and his daily needs, and the most elite household positions were reserved for the most intimate services. The rituals accompanying the daily service of dinner are just as elaborate as anything practiced in the court of Khubilai Khân.⁹⁸ The Burgundians' public displays, including joyous entries, jousts, and elaborate wedding and funeral ceremonials, were equally elaborate. Several historians have employed the term "theater state" to sum up the ceremonial element of Burgundian power.⁹⁹ It is an apt term: political and economic power was in a sense dramatized, made theatrical, through such displays. No one who witnessed the splendor of such events could have doubted the importance or authority of the

Burgundian dukes.

Conspicuous consumption and elaborate ritual were highly valued by European elites of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Judging by the content of eastern travel narratives, all manner of readers were spellbound by magnificence and pageantry, too. No matter whether the author were a missionary or a merchant, an eyewitness or an imposter, whether his account reached a wide contemporary audience or practically none, whether he wrote for laypeople or clerics, all praised the lavishness and sophistication of Yuan Chinese civilization.

Conclusion

Medieval travelers' tales distinguished between levels of civility in different parts of Asia, as in Poggio's summary of Niccolò's narrative:

All India is divided into three parts: the first, extending from Persia to the Indus; the second, comprising the district from the Indus to the Ganges; and the third, all that is beyond. This third part excels the others in wealth, humanity and refinement and is equal to our own country in the style of life and in civilization. For the inhabitants there have most sumptuous buildings, elegant habitations and handsome furniture; they lead a more refined life, removed from all barbarity and coarseness. The men are extremely humane [*perhumani*] and the merchants very rich, so much so that some will carry on their business in forty of their own ships, each of which is valued at fifty thousand gold pieces. These alone use tables at their meals, with tablecloths and silver vessels as we do. The inhabitants of the rest of India eat on carpets spread upon the ground.¹⁰⁰

Barbarism, simplicity, and the highest levels of civility could all be found in the Orient, but China exhibited qualities that were equal to the best of Europe. Other authors went further and asserted that realm of the Great Khân was unsurpassed by any other in the world. Travelers found the same elements to praise in Chinese cities, palaces, and ritual culture that European authors extolled at home, thus supporting the view that far from home European travelers often responded positively to the similar and indeed the superior in distant cultures. Moreover, the detail paid to more sophisticated aspects of financial or administrative organization than found in Europe suggests that Yuan practices could be seen to serve as models. While the authors never directly say, "We should do just as the Great Khân does," the implication is there.

The notion of "European" (as opposed to Christian) superiority was not yet widespread when western travelers first encountered the complex and sophisticated cultures of Yuan China. Observers and their readers were prepared to be impressed. Let us remember that in 1613 Samuel Purchas would ask, compared with Europe, what other lands are so "fortified with Castles, edified with Townes, crowned with Cities," which more advanced in "Arts and Inventions," "Liberall

Arts,” “Mechanical Sciences,” “Musical Inventions,” and all technological inventions?¹⁰¹ China in his eyes had lost any semblance of prestige, even in the fields of printing and firearms, compared with European supremacy. It was that preeminence in all things that, according to Purchas, justified the establishment of European colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. How differently the readers of medieval travel literature viewed the world. Hungry for knowledge of urban and courtly development and free from justifications for conquest, they possessed a curiosity that could be sated by travelers’ accounts of advanced Chinese civility.

Chapter 8

Bodies

In 1795 the third edition of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's *De generis humani varietate nativa* divided humanity into five categories: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Skin color, hair texture and quantity, skull shape, and facial features were taken as the markers of race. In describing the "Mongolian" group (by which Blumenbach meant all the inhabitants of Asia excluding those counted as "Malays") he adds a footnote quoting "a certain Yvo, a churchman of Narbonne, dated at Vienna in 1243." Yvo's letter is included in Matthew Paris's mid-thirteenth-century *Chronica majora*:

The Tartars have hard and strong breasts, thin and pale faces, stiff and upright cheekbones, short and twisted noses, chins prominent and sharp, the upper jaw low and deep, the teeth long and few, the eyebrows reaching from the hair of the head to the nose, the eyes black and unsettled, the countenance one-sided and fierce, the extremities bony and nervous, the legs also big, but the calf-bones short, the stature however the same as our own, for what is wanting in the legs, is made up for in the upper part of the body.¹

Yvo, in effect, describes a *natio*, a "nation" in the sense of a people bound by geographical origin, common territory, customs, language, law, religion, and appearance. Blumenbach's intention—to identify the physical features associated with one of five broad human groupings—is quite different, and indeed his portrait of the "Mongolian" type (which covers a far wider geographical area than Yvo's "Tartars") bears little in common with the medieval author's. Notwithstanding his quotation from Matthew's chronicle, Blumenbach's own description of "Mongolians" identifies these key bodily markers: yellow skin; black, stiff, straight, and scanty hair; squarish head; broad, flat face with small, flat "apish" nose; round cheeks; narrow, linear eyes; and prominent chins.² The two descriptions have only "prominent chins" in common.

I begin with these two descriptions, five and a half centuries apart, to draw attention to a conceptual gulf that Blumenbach's own reference to Yvo might seem to elide. As has been much discussed by historians of modern racial theory, Blumenbach was a key figure in

the development of the physical typologies by which modernity's major racial divisions are marked. He had precursors in Francois Bernier (1684), Carolus Linnaeus (1735), George-Louis Leclerc (Comte de Buffon, 1749–88), and Immanuel Kant (1777), but it is Blumenbach who is acknowledged as the “father of modern ‘skin and bones’ anthropology.”³ At the end of the eighteenth century, the human body moved to the center of perceptions of difference between peoples. That legacy is still very much with us, despite UNESCO's 1950 rejection of race as a scientifically valid concept and geneticists' denial that it has any chromosomal foundation.⁴ Bodies are interesting to us, given three-hundred-odd years of scientific racial theory; we shall see they were also important in medieval learned and encyclopedic works. This chapter asks whether the travel writers of our present focus shared this fascination and considers the cultural resonances of Asian bodily descriptions for medieval readers before Orientalism.

In brief, I argue that bodily features are important but not necessarily primary in precolonial travel writing on the far Orient and that in medieval travel writing oriental bodies signify in unsystematic and sometimes unpredictable ways. When travelers from Latin Christendom first ventured into lands far to the east they had to adapt their “gaze.” When they arrived in Asian countries and looked about at the inhabitants, they had not predetermined how to look or form narrative accounts of what they saw. With the desire to inform readers, most travel writers attempted to provide accurate descriptions of the human variety observed. The dominant existing cultural frameworks for conceiving bodies were theories of climate and environmental influence and discourses of monstrosity. These models had partial but by no means comprehensive utility for travelers describing distant Easts. As the last part of this chapter will show, the ancient imagery of monstrous bodies was part of the cultural furniture travelers took with them, but most were quick to discard it once they realized its lack of application to the peoples they met. Where monstrous peoples endured in late medieval travel writing was mainly in the works of fictional travelers or in application to peoples genuine travelers admitted they had not seen for themselves. This is not to say such imagery therefore lacked importance; on the contrary, the reappearance of monstrous races, especially in Mandeville's widely read book, indicates the power and longevity of belief in distant peoples as alien even in the face of many true travelers' assertions to the contrary. In the end, the chapter argues, the bodies of “monstrous” peoples retained their representative potency because they stood for the human plurality and possibility that readers looked for in descriptions of eastern realms and because they offered a reassuringly

familiar, and thus imaginatively pleasurable, vision of a world as created by God and described by the trusted authorities of ancient and Christian scholarship. The diversity found in medieval travelers' portraits of Asian peoples was produced through the mixed western worldview of the late medieval period, when travel had opened up European imaginations to cultures hardly previously considered outside of mythological traditions on wonders yet before the colonial urge to take possession had narrowed the western gaze to a more limited perspective on Asian bodies.

Bodies, "Race," and Climate

As we have just noted, racial categories devised by Enlightenment thinkers placed the body at the center of ethnographic discourse. A key question for medievalists, then, is to what extent bodies were also central to premodern thinking on human diversity. In our period the world had not yet been divided into a small and finite set of "racial" types. That is not to say that physical variation between peoples went unremarked or was empty of significance; however, the vocabulary and criteria were different, and the desire to group all of humanity within a small number of typologies was absent. Though many others have argued for the case for its retention, my own preference is not to use "race" for medieval contexts. Robert Bartlett has identified descent, customs, language, and law (the latter encompassing religious as well as juridical systems) as primary markers of difference in medieval discourse but for stylistic reasons prefers "race" over "ethnicity."⁵ Lisa Lampert-Weissig also argues for "race," saying religious and cultural differences formed the basic boundary underlying medieval prejudices and that bodily differences were sometimes viewed as an expression of that deeper religious difference.⁶ The reasons for my avoidance are threefold. First, this chapter's focus is specifically on European perceptions of Asian bodies, leaving aside religious and cultural matters. Thus the word would here be doubly anachronistic: in its modern anthropological sense and in the predominantly cultural/religious usage prominent medievalists have adapted for it. The second reason is contextual. Historians of medieval frontier societies on the margins of Europe and scholars of the Iberian *reconquista* have documented how innate, bodily attributes conveyed by blood became central to practices of inclusion and exclusion in late medieval colonialism. Alongside nativist thinking came the shift to conceiving Christianity as a product of birth and ancestry. This had profound consequences in Iberia with the *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) statutes beginning 1449.⁷ The motive to exclude is not applicable to medieval interest in Asia. The third reason

concerns vocabulary. “Race” and its cognates, which were regularly used by the later sixteenth century to refer to peoples linked by descent, derive from Old French *haras* (pedigree or stock), which was first used of hunting dogs and horses.⁸ When writers adapted “race” to human populations, first to identify nobility and only later to distinguish between ethnicities, they were looking for new terms to reflect relatively novel preoccupations with the ways descent was manifested in physical features. Earlier authors had found that *gens*, *natio*, *populus*, and *homines*, with their fusion of the cultural, geographical, and biological, conveyed the relevant clusters of meanings. To take a quick sample from two of our travel authors, Carpini uses *homines* roughly thirty times, *natio* thirteen, *gens* seven, and *populus* four, while Ricold employs *populus* six times, *natio* four, and *gens* and *homines* three times each in speaking of Mongol peoples. Modern translators of medieval travel writing on Asia often use “race” in translating terms such as *gens*, but this is potentially misleading.⁹

Our primary question remains: to what extent were bodies central to premodern thinking on human diversity? The answer, at least when we turn to learned texts, is “rather a lot.” As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen points out, Bartlett’s “descent, customs, law, and language” formulation leaves out the humoral-climatological aspects of bodily difference, that is, the effect of geography, climate, and humoral complexion in forming bodies. He suggests Bartlett’s privileging of ethnic over biological markers, along with a similar emphasis by Joan Cadden, may be due to their silent focus on *Christian* bodies.¹⁰ Some excellent studies examine the role of climate and environment in medieval ideas of ethnic diversity.¹¹ According to humoral-climatological theory, heavenly bodies (the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the “fixed stars”) had a formative influence on earthly matter. Thus geographical location affected the constitution of human bodies because planetary and stellar “radiation” affected different earthly locations in various ways. As Roger Bacon said in his *Opus majus*, “place is at the beginning of our existence, just as a father.”¹² Latitudinal location had a particular influence, as it determined earthly place in relation to the angle of the sun.¹³ Ptolemy divided the earth into seven climes, but medieval zonal maps more commonly showed five zones: frigid in the far north and south, temperate in median northern and southern climes, and a central, hot, and impassable torrid zone. There were many complicating factors within the broader theory and areas of debate among cosmologists, such as concerning the precise influence of the stars of the zodiac upon geographical regions, the nature of correspondences between the seven “planets” and earthly climatic zones, the influences of the twelve prevailing winds, and the function of regional geography

which, for example, rendered mountainous places climatically more “northern” than valleys.

Yet one point on which all cosmologists could agree, in Tooley’s summation, was that longitude was less important than latitude in shaping human bodies. In zonal maps, both Europe and Asia lay largely within the temperate zone, though their northern realms were counted as frigid and the lower portions of Asia (including lower India and southeast Asia) lay, like sub-Saharan Africa, in the torrid equatorial zone. While the sun was perceived as more potent in the eastern hemisphere where it was in the ascendant than in the western where it was descending, no one had identified how much the sun’s potency differed between the two. Thus—and this is very important for us—while the East was often perceived as a little warmer than the West, and some attributed cholera to the East and sanguine to the West, climate-based theories of bodily diversity were less easily applied to an East-West than north-south division.¹⁴

Hot conditions drew essential heat and moisture from the body; extreme cold, on the other hand, was also problematic as it caused the body to conserve too much moisture, thus lowering its vitality. The ideal climate was a temperate mean of moderate cold and dryness that conserved the body’s heat and moisture, thus promoting vitality. The bodily features and character traits of both northerly and southerly people could be accounted for by this model: in the cold, dry north, people are fair-skinned, strong, vigorous, tall, and broad; they have fine skin and hair, deep voices, large appetites, and good digestions; and they are long lived; in the hot, wet south, people are dark, small, and weak with dry and frizzled hair; and they have small appetites, poor digestion, and unpleasant high-pitched voices. In humoral terms, people of the south were perceived as typically melancholic, those of the far north as phlegmatic, while the inhabitants of temperate regions were the more preferred choleric and sanguine types.¹⁵ Akbari traces such ideas through a number of scientific and encyclopedic works with wide circulations and states that medieval writers “understood *all* bodily diversity to arise from the dictates of climate.”¹⁶ Similarly, Thomas Hahn asserts that “climactic explanations of color—dark pigment produced by exposure to the sun in a hot and dry environment—occur in virtually every medieval encyclopedia from Isidore to Bartholomew the Englishman and Pierre d’Ailly.”¹⁷ If medieval authors had applied humoral theory to east Asian bodies, one would expect them to be described as long, lean, brown or tawny in skin tone, with crisp dry black hair: that is, with typically “choleric” complexion. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, in John Trevisa’s Middle English translation, writes, “colerik men beþ generalliche wraþeful, hardy, vnmeke, li3t, vnstable, inpetuous; in body long, sklendre, and lene; in

colour broun; in eer blak and crips, hard and stif; in touche hoot; in puls strong and swifte.”¹⁸ The depiction of “Colericus” in John de Foxton’s *Liber Cosmographiae* (1408) shows a thin, frowning, gesticulating man, girded with a sword and spitting flowers from his mouth. In the words of the book’s modern editor, “Colericus is shaggy, deceitful, angry, a spendthrift, rash, astute, slender, dry and yellow in color. His symbolic attributes are the flower in his mouth—possibly from his association with summer, and the sword, signifying his irascible temperament.”¹⁹ We will shortly see the limitations of this imagery in application to Asian bodies.

Humoral-climatological theories of bodily differences thus presented an authoritative framework theoretically available to late medieval travel writers. Yet, at the same time, that model also posed a problem because of its focus on latitudinal location and north-south alignment. Though parts of the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia lay conceptually in the hot southerly zone, central and east Asian peoples dwelt in temperate realms, thus enjoying the preferred mean between hot and cold though perhaps a little warmer than in the West. Moreover, as Roger Bacon testifies, the new geographic knowledge gained through the reports of travelers showed up the limitations of Ptolemy’s climate model and astral theories. As a prelude to his own description of the known world, he states, “This path by which I shall proceed is not that of astronomical attestation, namely, by the true longitudes and latitudes of places with respect to the heavens, because the Latins do not have this knowledge as yet.”²⁰ Instead he relies on written descriptions of regions and on reports by travelers, including William of Rubruck.²¹ Bacon’s statement shows how the information obtained by travelers by the mid-thirteenth century was beginning to test the limits of ancient knowledge. Though he argues fervently for the importance of astrology as a serious branch of study, he is scathing about simplistic interpretations of celestial-earthly influences.²² It is most intriguing that in composing his own geographical and ethnographic survey he sets aside astrology in favor of traveler observation.

In examining travelers’ accounts of Asian bodies, we will find, just as Bacon did, that we need to reassess the apparent dominance of climate theory as an explanatory structure. We can not only assess how climate theory influenced travelers’ gazes upon the bodies of Asian peoples but also consider how motivations ranging from fear of conquest, to pragmatic curiosity and desire to procure useful knowledge, to a wondering admiration for advanced civilizations contributed to a richly diverse vision of the peoples of Asia.

Writing Asian Bodies

Some of the most detailed early physical descriptions of Asian peoples occur in Matthew Paris's *Chronica majora*, recording early thirteenth-century Tartar attacks. Matthew's accounts of Mongols were taken at second- or thirdhand, often from Europeans who had heard about Mongols but had not necessarily seen them. Matthew's entry for 1238 tells of "special ambassadors" sent by Saracens reporting on Mongol raids in the near East and pressing into Hungary. They described the Mongols as having "very large heads, by no means proportionate to their bodies," as feeders on raw and even human flesh, and as "of robust strength and large in their bodies."²³ Matthew's account of 1240 portrays further Mongol incursions as a reminder of the lamentations of the world, calls them a "people of Satan [*plebs Sathanae*]" and "like demons loosed from Tartarus (so that they are well called Tartars, as it were inhabitants of Tartarus)," calls them "inhuman and bestial, rather to be called monsters than men," and alleges that they drink blood and eat the flesh of dogs and humans. Physically "they are short in stature and thickset, compact in their bodies, and of great strength," needing three steps instead of stirrups to mount their horses given their shortness of leg.²⁴ These are only brief references to physical attributes in the context of descriptions of alleged fighting methods, lawlessness, and ignorance.

Matthew Paris also quotes directly a number of letters composed by European dignitaries who were more directly affected by the Mongolian depredations in the East. They focus on Tartar onslaught, ruthlessness, and fighting methods, with a little ethnographic material.²⁵ A letter from a Hungarian bishop who claims to have interrogated two Mongolian spies taken into his custody, c. 1242, includes the statement that the Mongols—although incomparable warriors—can do nothing on foot "because they have short legs and long bodies," are better archers than are Hungarians or Comanians, and have "stronger limbs."²⁶ The Landgrave of Thuringia, in the midst of the now conventional lament of their brutal onslaught, indiscriminate and anthropophagous eating habits, and pitiless brutality, notes that "[t]hey are terrible in person, furious in aspect, their eyes show anger, their hands are rapacious, their teeth are bloody, and their jaws are ever ready to eat the flesh of men, and to drink human blood."²⁷ Perhaps the most forceful and vivid account comes from Archbishop Yvo, as Blumenbach noticed, writing in 1243, to whom Mongols are "a fierce people of inhuman men [*gens ingens, homines inhumani*], whose law is lawlessness, whose wrath is fury, the rod of God's anger."²⁸ Yvo, however, turned to another party, an Englishman who had reportedly been exiled for criminal activity and

learned eastern languages after losing all his belongings gambling in Acre and whom the Mongols had bound in their service to make use of his linguistic talents. If one can believe any of this tall tale, it is from the unnamed Englishman that Yvo took the physical description of Mongols quoted at the beginning of this chapter (hard and robust breasts; lean and pale faces; stiff, high cheekbones; short, distorted noses; sharp and prominent chins; low and deep upper jaws; long and few teeth; enormous eyebrows; black and restless eyes; long and grim countenances; bony and nervous extremities; and thick legs short below the knee). Let us note, though, that the physical description is embedded within a much longer account of Mongol temperament, internal discipline, religion, severity, geographic origins, and (most especially) their arms, weapons, methods, and motives of warfare. Thus greater attention is paid to cultural than to physical characteristics.²⁹

Among the sources collected by Paris, Emperor Frederick II's desperate plea to the king of England for aid is unusual in identifying environmental influences upon the character of the Mongol hordes: "Some time since a people of a barbarous race and mode of life called (from what place or origin I know not) Tartars, has lately emerged from the regions of the south, where it had long lain hid, burnt up by the sun of the torrid zone, and, thence marching towards the northern parts, took forcible possession of the country there, and remaining for a time, multiplied like locusts."³⁰ On their physique, he states that "[t]he men themselves are small and of short stature, as far as regards height, but compact, stout, and bulky, resolute, strong, and courageous, and ready at the nod of their leader to rush into any undertaking of difficulty; they have large face, scowling looks, and utter horrible shouts suited to their hearts."³¹ Frederick's letter suggests there was some ambivalence surrounding medieval understanding of Mongol geographic origin. Although elsewhere it is said that the Mongols had burst forth from northern mountainous regions,³² Frederick devises a more complex genealogy that apparently identifies their ferocity with their originally southern, "burned up" constitution. Yet later Carpini would speak of "the Tartars and the other oriental nations" and suggest that their country "lies in that part of the east where, so we believe, the east joins the north."³³ This lack of agreement—were the Mongols northern, southern, or eastern peoples?—makes it difficult to assign any particular set of astral influences to the Tartar body. The sixteenth-century polymath Jean Bodin would include the Tartars along with the Goths, Vandals, Franks, and Normans on his list of peoples whose cold, northerly origin produced the best soldiers because cold climate makes men brave and full of vigor, sense-driven and unintelligent.³⁴

However, although the texts of our study certainly concurred with the image of Tartars as a wrathful, warlike people, they did not generally develop this on account of an explicit equation between Mongol environment and temperament.³⁵

In these earliest accounts by Europeans, Mongol bodies certainly matter and aid their collective portrait as a ferocious enemy, but they seem less important than information on their conquests and military methods. The physical characteristics that receive constant iteration are their shortness (especially of leg), stockiness, and ferocity of expression, thus driving home the message that this is a warrior people before whom Christendom must tremble.

John of Plano Carpini, a true witness and ever pragmatic reporter, is more measured than these predecessors, and he pays more attention to Mongol facial features where earlier writers had emphasized brute force and inhuman appetites.

In appearance, the Mongolians are quite different from all other men, for they are broader than other people between the eyes and across the cheek-bones. Their cheeks also are rather prominent above their jaws; they have a flat and small nose, their eyes are little and their eyelids raised up to the eyebrows. For the most part, and with but a few exceptions, they are slender about the waist; almost all are of medium height. Hardly any of them grow beards, although some have a little hair on the upper lip and chin and this they do not trim.³⁶

Lest we conclude Carpini's interest was primarily ethnographic, we should note that these details were added to the second, longer version of Carpini's book and support his advice on what to do when Mongol warriors are taken as prisoners of war: one may know how to recognize a Tartar in such instances by this physical description.³⁷

The Tartar Relation also identifies cultural factors explaining aspects of physique: "These Tartars are generally of low stature and rather thin, owing to their diet of mare's milk, which makes a man slim, and their strenuous life. They are broad of face with prominent cheekbones."³⁸ Mandeville, in a harsh description of Mongol warfare influenced by Simon of St. Quentin as well as Carpini, similarly notes that Mongol men have small eyes and sparse beards.³⁹

Rubruck makes little mention of Mongol bodies apart from his allegations concerning the fatness, ugliness, and flat noses of the women and a passing remark about Batu's physical size and facial redness.⁴⁰ However, he perhaps mentioned the subject to Roger Bacon because the latter asserts, in marked contrast with the accounts reported by Matthew Paris, that "Tartars are small, weak men" whose physique is partly due to their poor diet.⁴¹ Ricold of Monte Croce's largely damning account, written after residence in Mongol-occupied Persia, comments that Mongols are different from other people in their person as well as their customs and religious practice (*in persona, in*

moribus et in ritu), with very large and wide faces, small eyes like crosswise fixtures in the middle of the face, little beard, and (especially among the elderly) resemblance to monkeys.⁴² Ricold does not connect Tartar appearance to climate, as Carpini and Rubruck had also failed to do, though his familiarity with the theory is evident elsewhere. In his portrayal of “baxitas [*bakhshi*],” Indian holy men honored by the Mongols as “idol priests [*pontifices ydolorum*],” he remarks that “they are black and sunburned, but their region is very temperate,” indicating a disjunction in this case between climatological theory and ethnographic observation.⁴³ Ricold’s description of Mongols is the most critical among the authentic late medieval travelers, though Felicitas Schmieder has shown how European poets and artists of the late Middle Ages were also likely to portray Mongols as devilish or ugly.⁴⁴ Thus negative thirteenth-century imagery of Mongols endured in some European minds.

Marco Polo’s book provides an interesting comparison. The fifty or so years intervening between the composition of the Tartar sections of Matthew Paris’s chronicle and Polo’s text of c. 1298 saw a radical change of attitude toward Mongols among some European observers following the Mongol conquest of China. Polo devotes several pages to Mongol culture and habits: geographic origins and early way of life, the rise of Chinggis and battle with “Prester John,” Chinggis’s successors, Mongol burial habits, transhumance, portable housing, carts, women’s work, eating habits, marital practices, gods and religious rituals, clothing, arms and military methods, hardiness and endurance, military organization and provisioning, battle tactics, legal system and punishments, pastoral practices, and the curious habit of making marriages for deceased children. Yet he gives no generalized physical description of the people.⁴⁵ Indeed, his only mention of Mongol physique is in his very favorable portrait of Khubilai himself. He is of “fair size, neither small nor large, but is of middle size. He is covered with flesh in a beautiful manner; he is more than well formed in all parts. He has his face white and red like a rose, the eyes black and beautiful; the nose well made and well set.”⁴⁶ This jovial figure is a far cry from the blood-drinking, man-eating, monstrously brutal Mongols of Matthew’s *Chronica*. Polo’s complimentary portrayal of Khubilai befits his laudatory account of Mongol-controlled China, and Debra Higgs Strickland perceptively notes how it matches contemporary European notions of preferred physiognomy:

the *Divisament* authors take care to emphasize Khubilai Khân’s fair skin, good build, medium height, shapely nose, and dark eyes, all of which are traditionally positive physiognomic features. For example, Roger Bacon in his mid-thirteenth-century edition of the *Physiognomy* notes, “The best proportioned construction is of him who possesses medium stature, black hair and eyes—the latter somewhat deep-set—round face, white mixed with red or moderately brown color, with perfect form and well-

Although the *Divisament* does not make explicit connection between physiognomic theory and Khubilai's appearance, it is likely many readers would have drawn this conclusion for themselves. Khubilai's essentially sanguineous complexion would seem to be primarily a matter of his individual makeup and social status; by geography, one would expect a more “choleric” type that would be leaner and taller with tawny coloring.

Medieval emphasis on East-West similarity rather than difference may help account for medieval illuminators' attempts to portray Khubilai Khân, his wives, and courtiers. Illustrators commonly depict Khubilai with pale skin (sometimes pink) and with a large nose and wide eyes, while some manuscripts give him and his wives blond hair. It is interesting that the same manuscripts also sometimes portray non-royal Mongols with dark skin; Strickland describes these as “functional Saracens.”⁴⁸ For example, the illuminated *Divisament* in the British Library's Royal Manuscript 19 D.1 includes battle scenes from Mongol history where the forces have dark skins and white turbans, very similar to Saracens shown elsewhere in the book, but depictions shift after the accession of Khubilai. The Khân is shown feasting with his wives, and all of their servants have pale skin, large eyes, and blond hair.⁴⁹ The richly illuminated *Livre des Merveilles*, which includes copies of the works of Marco Polo, Odoric, Mandeville, Hetoum, and Ricold, depicts Mongol women as indistinguishable from Europeans while Khubilai and other Mongol men are slightly swarthy but not clearly Asiatic in features. The Great Khân and his followers are regularly shown with straggly or forked beards, and the Khân generally wears an oriental crown with a point and tilted brim: indeed, hats and headgear seem the primary ethnic markers in these images.⁵⁰ The northern European artists responsible likely never saw a Mongolian person, and the sources they illustrate give patchy and inconsistent physical information. The results range from scenes differing little from what one would find in depictions of contemporary European court life (particularly the dining scenes) to the strongly exotic. In contrast, Italian masters such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti (whose *Martyrdom of the Franciscans at Ceuta*, 1332, depicts figures with apparently Asiatic features), Andrea da Firenze (whose *Ecclesia Militans* in the Spanish Chapel S. Maria Novella Florence, 1365, does likewise), and Antonio Pisanello (who sketched a Mongol archer, c. 1440) had probably seen Mongolian slaves in northern Italian cities.⁵¹

The *Divisament* pays rather more attention to Muslim and Indian bodies. In many places in west and south Asia, the complexion of the

inhabitants does appear to match their climatological setting, even if the *Divisament* rarely makes explicit causal links between climate and physiognomy. Furthermore, references to a region's climate and its people's skin color, where they appear, are often lines or pages apart. Muslim inhabitants of scorching Ormuz, for example, are "black" (noir), while the people of temperate (*tenpre*) Kashmir, which is "not too hot nor too cold," are lean and dark (but "not perfectly black," adds a later copyist) and the women "are very beautiful for dark women [*les femes sunt mout belles selonc fames brunes*]." ⁵² In hot Pasciai (perhaps Kafiristan), the brown-skinned people speak a strange language, worship idols, are of evil disposition, and are skilled in diabolical arts. ⁵³ In Maabar, which Polo finds excessively hot, infants are anointed each week with sesame oil to make them blacker than they would otherwise be, for "he who is more black is more precious than the others and is held better than the others who are not so black." ⁵⁴ Some Court French manuscripts added the more damning remark that the babies "became as black as a devil." ⁵⁵ Polo is also intrigued that the people paint their idols black and devils "white as snow. For they say that God and all the saints are black; and they speak of their God and of their saints; and they say that the devils are white." ⁵⁶ More neutral is his comment that the people of Coilum (Kollum), which is almost unbearably hot, are "all black, men and women [*tuit noir, masles et femes*]," though he also remarks on their nakedness and casual attitude carnal sin. ⁵⁷

It is noticeable, then, that bodily features in general, and skin color in particular, are commented on more in Marco Polo's accounts of Muslim peoples of western Asia, the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, and southeast Asians than in his accounts of either Mongolia or China. Carpini also mentions the Indians (*Indos*) of lesser India (*minorem Indiam*), where "the black people are Saracens, and are called Ethiopians." ⁵⁸ Friar Menentillus, whose letter may have been authored by John of Monte Corvino, makes much more effort than any other among our collection to locate India by its astrological influence. He states that the region is always warm but not excessively so, which is due to such factors as the timing and angle of the sun's rays on entering Virgo in August and Aries in March. The people are idolaters with no consciousness of sin, but he comments also on their civility and friendliness, even though their habit of eating with their hands makes them resemble pigs rather than men. In appearance they reminded him of Italian peasants; "they are not exactly black, but rather olive, and are very well-formed, both the women and men." ⁵⁹ Jordan says that the people of scorchingly hot and dry western India are "all black"; indeed (echoing Marco Polo), "as for the women and men, the blacker they be, the more beautiful they be." ⁶⁰ Hetoum of

Armenia mentions the inhabitants of the islands of hot southeast Asia are “all black [*tous noirs*]” and naked.⁶¹ Poggio’s recounting of Niccolò dei Conti’s travels provides an explicitly climatological explanation of dark skin, noting that the people of Sunda and Banda are “black on account of the heat.”⁶² Manuscript illuminations tend to portray Indian and southeast Asian peoples as black (and sometimes as black dogheads); however, an exquisite scene of pearl fishers in Maabar shows fair-skinned people.⁶³

Within the travelers’ texts, the greatest revulsion is reserved for peoples who possess features deemed excessively large or deformed to western eyes, with dark skin only sometimes a feature. Marignolli suggests that the people of eastern Sri Lanka are descendants of men who escaped Noah’s flood “and who call themselves the sons of Cain.” They have huge, hideous, and frightful faces, stink beyond endurance, and have wives and children as hideous as they.⁶⁴ The friar claims to have seen such men, unlike Carpini and Rubruck, whose comments on the Tibetans as “exceedingly deformed” are probably not based on observation.⁶⁵ But the most powerfully negative of all physical descriptions are of African rather than Asian peoples. Jordan says eastern Africans are “very black, pot-bellied, fat, but short; having thick lips and squab nose, overhanging forehead, and hideous countenances.”⁶⁶ To Marco Polo, the male inhabitants of the island of Zanzibar are stout and large-limbed like giants, immensely strong with huge appetites, and black-skinned; they have hair so crisp it cannot be straightened even with water, a great mouth and flat nose, and lips and eyes so large “that they are very horrible [*orible*] to see”; that, in short, if they were seen in any other country they would be called “devils [*diablos*].” The women are “very ugly [*mout laide*]” with great mouths, eyes, and noses, and breasts four times the usual size. The description accords well with encyclopedists’ views of African physiognomy, even if Polo does not mention climate as a directly causal factor. Later transcribers and translators added numerous details to enhance the impression of hideousness and likeness to devils, such as the huge penises of the men.⁶⁷ Mandeville holds hot climate responsible for the black skin of the Nubians and says that Ethiopian children are born yellow but later turn black.⁶⁸

Also congruent with climate-based physiology theory is the *Divisament*’s account of the far-northern “Region of Darkness,” where men live like beasts and are “very large, and well made in all parts, but they are very pale and have no colour [*cestes jens sunt mout granz e bien fait de toutes menbres; mes il sunt mout pales e ne ont color*].” Here pallor is associated with beastliness.⁶⁹ Polo’s Zanzibar dwellers and his peoples of the extreme north thus accord very well with what encyclopedists had to say about the somatic effects of torrid and arctic

climates, even if (once again) the connection is not explicitly stated.

Climate, however, is not a major factor in descriptions of the Han Chinese people of Cathay and Manzi—regions which, as we saw in Chapter 7, were praised by almost every medieval traveler. Carpini says of Cathayans, “they have no beard and their physiognomy is much like that of the Mongols, though they are not so broad in the face,” without finding cause in climate.⁷⁰ Rubruck remarks of the Chinese that “they are small men, who when speaking breathe heavily through the nose; and it is a general rule that all orientals [*omnes orientales*] have a small opening for the eyes” but again does not seek an environmental explanation.⁷¹ Not all travelers mention Chinese eyes. Indeed, the sparse beards of Chinese men and attractive appearance of both men and women feature more often. The beauty of Chinese women has been discussed already (Chapter 5), such as in the Venetian version of the *Divisament* that notes that the ladies of Ergiuul are “very white and have very fair flesh [*Elle sunt mult blanches et ont mult belle chars*].”⁷² In a couple of Chinese locations the *Divisament* mentions brown people, but the aim seems to be to provide straightforward observation rather than to place appearance according to a set environmental model: thus in Succiu province (Suzhou, now Jiuquan) the climate is healthy and the people brown, according to the Latin Z manuscript, while the people of Toloman (possibly in what is now northern Cambodia) are very good-looking and brown in complexion, though climate not remarked.⁷³

Hetoum of Armenia finds that the Cathayans include “among them many attractive men and women, according to their nation [*nacion*]” and “all have very small eyes and [speaking of the men] sparse beards,” and though they are not strong they are excellent craftsmen.⁷⁴ Odoric says of the people of Manzi that “these men are quite attractive of body, yet pale, having straggling long beards like mousers; that is, cats” and (as we have seen) that the women are the most beautiful in the world.⁷⁵ Mandeville follows Odoric on all these points.⁷⁶ Niccolò says that the people beyond the Ganges have no beards and very long hair and resemble Europeans in stature and life span, and though a few lines later he says they wear little clothing because of the heat, he does not connect their physiognomy to climate.⁷⁷ It was not until the 1550s that we find opinions on Chinese appearance that come closer to modern pejorative stereotypes, in the report of Friar Gaspar de Cruz:

Although the Chinas commonly are ill-favoured, having small eyes, and their faces and noses flat, and are beardless, with some few little hairs on the point of the chin, notwithstanding there are some who have very good faces, and well-proportioned, with great eyes, their beards well set, and their noses well shapen. But these are very few, and it may be that they are descended from other nations which of old times were mixed up with the Chinas when they communicated with different peoples.⁷⁸

Medieval European travelers admired the Yuan Mongols and Han Chinese and their civilizations, perceiving more similarity than difference between themselves and the peoples of Yuan China. Yet as early as the mid-sixteenth century more Eurocentric views were emerging.

As China, like Europe, lay within the Macrobian temperate zone, the physical attractions of its inhabitants may have been comprehended by some readers within climatological discourse. However, this is not a matter to which the travelers draw attention. Moreover, it is difficult to notice much in the way of correspondence between Chinese physiology and the choleric humor, which Bartholomaeus Anglicus associated with lean and slender build, brownish skin, and dark, crisply curling hair. If skin color is mentioned at all, Chinese people are described as pale or white. Marco Polo also comments (without seeing them) that the inhabitants of Japan are pale skinned and beautiful.⁷⁹ Humoral-climatological scholarship was more likely to link pallor to phlegmatic complexion. Of course, in the racial typologies of the modern era, including Blumenbach's (quoted earlier), Asiatic peoples are often "yellow." The only mention of yellow skin among our medieval travelers comes from Mandeville and refers not to east Asians but to the people who dwell by the River Inde from which (he says) "India" takes its name; they have bad-colored skin that is green and yellow in color.⁸⁰ The illuminated *Livre des Merveilles* depicts some but not all Chinese men with thin beards and does not mark them as different from Europeans in facial features or skin color.

A modern reader is bound to pay attention to mention of skin color in historical texts, conditioned as we are by the central place of melanin in racial theory and its role in modern sociopolitical conflicts. Blackness was also, it is clear, a physical characteristic of interest to some medieval writers and artists. In addition to its connection to hot climate, dark skin often carried negative moral signification.⁸¹ Yet in travelers' tales of Asia, darkness does not signify in an entirely consistent fashion. It could often be explained by hot climate but was not always consonant with such. It was sometimes seen as a negative attribute; at other times it had neutral or even positive associations. Ugliness or deformity of peoples was not always connected with skin color, or indeed with eye shape or any other feature. Even in the early sixteenth century, skin color had a far from ubiquitous significance. Groebner tells us that Bartolomäus Cycles's 1536 work *Physionomi vnd chiromanci* had long chapters on the inhabitants of Africa and Asia, yet has only brief reference to the blackness of certain tribes in Africa and says nothing about skin pigmentation of Asian or Indian people, while Dawson contends that it was only in the seventeenth century that

racial categories indicate a reduction of a wide range of bodily signs in favor of an increasingly simplistic black-white distinction.⁸² According to Hannaford, it was not until the eighteenth century that “black” came regularly to stand for “physical or mental inferiority.”⁸³

Bodies do matter, but are not primary, in medieval travelers’ depictions of Asian peoples. Medieval travel writers are much more interested in the cultural practices and social organization of eastern peoples. Marco Polo devotes more space to the use of paper money and elaborate postal systems than to physical attributes of any Asian peoples. John of Plano Carpini and Ricold of Monte Croce are more intrigued by the political influence and military activities of Mongolian women than by any Mongolian bodily features. The eating habits and foodstuffs of Asian peoples were a fascinating subject for almost all the authors under study, certainly of greater interest than eye shape or skin color. Moreover, physical features hold unsystematic and sometimes unpredictable meanings. While brown or black skin was certainly often accounted for by the heat of southerly climes, the relatively dark pigment of some other Asian peoples could not be explained by the same model. Much of the racial typing that would become familiar by the height of European imperialism was either absent altogether (such as yellow skin) or had not yet become an inevitable element within a standard stereotype (such as narrow eyes for east Asians). Naturally there are overlapping or continuous elements between the views found in medieval texts and more modern ones, but there are many areas of discontinuity as well. Chinese were white. Black could be beautiful. Khubilai Khân could be held up as an exemplum of ideal complexion. Although Mongols were often depicted in negative and phobic terms, oriental peoples could alternatively be found most attractive. No oriental people is yellow, apart from some mythical Indians in Mandeville, and even they are green *and* yellow.

One of the key contentions of this book has been that European travel to distant Asia troubled western conceptions about its place in the world. Older imagery of a fabulous yet alien east, though never fully shaken off, was challenged by the experiences of late medieval travelers. Similarly, the ancient frameworks that comprehended earthly geography and human bodily composition with reference to the formative influences of heavenly bodies could not provide an entirely dependable basis for the new knowledge of the world. The new curiosity—in which some of the old ways of making sense of the world, though not abandoned, were found to be inadequate to the experience of witnesses—was productive of a diverse and diffuse range of responses. Travelers and their readers expressed inquisitiveness about distant Asian people that could not always be constrained within established modes of meaning, and this diversity is

apparent in attempts to portray the bodies of Asian peoples. Their reports have the power to unsettle any assumptions we may hold about premodern, precolonial European perspectives on Otherness, and that is their great value.

However, there was another chapter yet to be completed in this new genre of travel writing. Conventional perspectives on the world could not be given up so easily. We see this especially in the case of fictional travelogues of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in which ancient figures of monsters returned to haunt the European imagination; to give pleasure to Christian readers; and to restore the sense of the world as a place of the wonders inherent in divine creation.

The Return of Monsters

We did not ask him if he had seen any monsters, for monsters had ceased to be news.⁸⁴

The more journeys Europeans made into Asia, the more their skepticism about monsters grew. However, increased doubt among genuine travelers was abruptly countered by elaborate inventions by imposter travelers and manuscript illuminators. Late medieval readers retained a desire for wonders in the East. It was a conservative impulse that kept the Orient within the horizons of expectation: that is, of a world comprehensible within the conventions of classical authority and divine creation.

The monsters at the edges of the medieval world were comforting in their repetition. In addition, they had ancient credentials through representation by ancient authors (notably Homer, Herodotus, Ctesias, Megasthenes, Pliny, and Solinus) as well as more recent works (the Alexander romances, *Wonders of the East*, *The Letter of Prester John*, and *mappaemundi*). At the very least, in reading of the distant East, north, or south one could expect to find dogheads, Cyclopes, Amazons, pygmies, giants, androgynes, blemmyae, sciapods, all manner of anthropophagi, and quite likely some exotic additions such as the people who live off the smell of apples or those covered in feathers with a habit of leaping into trees. The earliest travelers to venture east carried these creatures as part of their mental furniture. It was traditional to locate monstrous peoples in regions very distant from the homeland of the author or cartographer, such as in Scythia, Ethiopia, the frozen far north, Ireland, India, Cathay, or Cipangu.

Friedman suggests that this habit of pushing monsters to the margins was illustrative of Eurocentric xenophobia: "From the classical period through the Middle Ages, Western Europeans seemed

to give an enormous ethnographic shrug of distaste,” pushing monstrous peoples ever “outward and eastward from the Western centers of humanity.”⁸⁵ In a similar vein, Bartlett notes of twelfth-century ethnographic writing, “The more remote the region ... describe[d], the more fantastic the inhabitants become.”⁸⁶ Yet Christian perceptions of monsters could encompass the positive as well as the negative. The universalist creed of Christianity, especially in the patristic era, prized all peoples of the earth as potential Christians, and dogheads of distant realms came to be particularly valued.⁸⁷ The locus classicus for this view, often quoted by medieval and Renaissance writers as well as by recent scholars, is in St. Augustine’s explanation that all mortal rational creatures are descendants of Adam:

[N]o faithful Christian should doubt that anyone who is born anywhere as a man—that is, a rational and mortal being—derives from that one first-created human being. And this is true, however extraordinary such a creature may appear to our senses in bodily shape, in colour, or motion, or utterance, or in any natural endowment, or part, or quality.⁸⁸

By the Carolingian period, this view was joined by a negative association of the monstrous with the degenerate or even cursed, which “replaced curiosity about the races and evangelical interest with suspicion, fear, and hostility.”⁸⁹ A more neutral tradition, looking to classical influences and etymology, looked on *monstra* as portents or expressions of divine will. *Monstrum* was from *monstro*, to show, but medieval authors further claimed links with *monitus*, an admonition or warning. In the ancient world it was usually applied to individual births—what later ages would refer to as “freaks of nature”—but by the seventh century could refer to groups of humanity.⁹⁰ By the later Middle Ages the monster could be a kind of noble savage (for example, Bragmanni and Amazons) whose habits rather than bodies served as moral exemplars to European readers.⁹¹ However, the monsters who adorn the pages of late medieval illuminated books convey little or no moral, portentous, or admonitory message but rather appealed as “a pastime,” as “naturalistic observation for its own sake freed from moral judgement and show[ing] a fascination with human diversity,” not signifying “anything beyond the pleasure they give to the beholder.”⁹²

Recent scholarship has extended this already wide range of monstrous meanings. David Williams explores the theological functions of teratology as a discourse offering a third mode of thought between the *via positiva* of rationality and *via negativa* of mysticism.⁹³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen uses the Lacanian concept of *extimité* (“external intimacy” or “intimate alterity”), suggesting that what seems most distant is only representable if it corresponds to something within.⁹⁴

As Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills put it, “Monsters are polysemous entities, functioning in a wide range of situations and to a variety of ends.”⁹⁵ It is certainly not enough only to assert they represented the Other.

John of Plano Carpini relayed tales of strange peoples in the East: not that he had seen them but had heard tell of them: “In the land of the Karakitayans to the south is a vast desert, which, they say for a certainty, is inhabited by wild men [*silvestris homines*], who do not speak at all and have no joints in their legs.”⁹⁶ He told stories at thirdhand about the Mongol army’s encounters with monstrous people among whom “every female born there had a human form, but every male had the shape of a dog.”⁹⁷ *The Tartar Relation* adds, “Friar Benedict believes beyond doubt that he saw one of the dog’s women with the Tartars, and says she had even borne male children from them, but the boys were monsters. The aforesaid dogs are exceptionally shaggy, and understand every word the women say, while the women understand the dog’s sign language.”⁹⁸ Carpini continues: in the far north the Mongolian army encountered the “Parossites,” who “have small stomachs and tiny mouths, so we were told, and they cook meat but do not eat it; when it is cooked they lean over the pot and inhale the steam and this is their only refreshment,”⁹⁹ and *The Tartar Relation* concurs.¹⁰⁰

Still farther north, the Mongols “reached a land bordering on the ocean, where they came across monsters, who, we were told for a fact, had a human shape in every respect except that the extremities of their feet were like the hooves of oxen and, although they had human heads, they had the faces of dogs.” While their speech was partly human, every third word was a dog’s bark.¹⁰¹ Turning south, the Tartars came to a desert where “so we are told as a certain truth” they found monsters with human shape but only one arm and one foot who ran fast by hopping and, “when they grew tired with this method of progress, then they got along on the hand and foot turning cart-wheels. (Isidore called them Cyclopedes.) When this exhausted them, they ran again in their former fashion.”¹⁰² Benedict the Pole also mentions the “dog-headed Cynocephali” and abstemious “Parocitae.”¹⁰³ The account of the journey of King Haiton of Armenia (1254–55) includes mention of certain peoples of the Zungharian desert (in the northern part of the modern Xinjiang province): “naked wild men with horse hair on their heads”; “The breasts of the females were extremely large and pendant” and the people had no language.¹⁰⁴

John of Plano Carpini has been treated as a comparatively reliable witness through most of this book, so it is intriguing that monsters serve most to damage his credibility. His problem, though, is not of

false witness—he made no claims to seeing these peoples himself—but credulity. His hosts included stories of monstrous peoples in telling him their history of Chinggis’s conquests. The Franciscan, having no particular reason to doubt them and surely having heard tell of such monsters in ancient accounts of the East, merely relayed what he heard. Later visitors were more inclined to be skeptical. Rubruck tells that he inquired about the “monsters or human freaks who are described by Isidore and Solinus, but was told that such things had never been sighted, which makes us very much doubt whether [the story] is true.”¹⁰⁵ “Menentillus” remarks that he has inquired about “men of a marvellous kind, to wit, men of a different make from the rest of us” but learned nothing, just as he also can find out nothing about marvelous animals or the Terrestrial Paradise.¹⁰⁶ Jordan’s only mention of monstrous races comes in speaking of “Java” (probably Sumatra), which he did not visit, where dwelt “very small men [*homines parvulini*] of the size of a boy of three or four years old, all shaggy like a he goat. They dwell in the woods, and few are found.”¹⁰⁷ Odoric verges on speaking of monstrosity, and to identifying a climatic cause for it, in his account of Ormuz on the Persian Gulf where the heat is so great that men’s testicles grow so large they hang halfway down the legs. The lives of such men are endangered by their giant testicles, and they must make use of cooling lotions and bandages to contain their monstrous members.¹⁰⁸ He also comments on the “pygmy [*pigmei*]” tribes of Manzi near the Yangzi River among whom the women married and bore children from the age of five: “But they have rational souls like ourselves.” He calls the pygmies *homines* and distinguishes them from the “full-sized men” of the region by their height.¹⁰⁹ Yet Marco Polo denies that the dried bodies brought to Europe are the corpses of “little men,” describing how con artists manufacture them from monkeys.¹¹⁰

We might expect John of Marignolli to drift into fancy on marvelous peoples, but he casts off his customary confusion of geography, ethnography, and biblical mythology to deal in a distinctly rational fashion with the question of “monsters which histories or rather fables construct or rather portray and have been said to exist in India,” citing Augustine’s Book 16 of the *City of God*. He notes some individual monstrous births that he had heard of or seen in Italy but does not regard them as representative of a species. While in India, he says, he diligently looked for and inquired about such creatures, but the people he met in turn asked *Marignolli* where they could be found. He concludes that there are no nations of such people, though here and there an individual monster may be found. The legend of peoples with one foot with which they shade themselves comes from the Indian habit of going naked, he says, with a little umbrella at hand to

shield them from sun or rain.¹¹¹

Such skepticism is out of keeping with what many readers expect of medieval travelers. For example, Gananath Obeyesekere, the distinguished anthropologist, refers to the “medieval travel literature that peopled the vaguely known world of Asia with strange monsters and wild men.”¹¹² As medievalists have been at pains to point out, this stereotype of medieval travel literature greatly exaggerates the importance of monsters in the discourse. Marco Polo, the most widely read of the authentic travelers, describes men of Lambri (Odoric’s Lamori, probably an island north of Sumatra) as having tails of more than a palm in length, but not hairy, and Andaman Islanders as idolaters with heads, teeth, and eyes like dogs, but that is the extent of his account of the alleged “strange monsters.”¹¹³

Yet monsters could not be so quickly killed off. Medieval readers were still hungry for marvels. If reliable travelers, and others who were otherwise often unreliable, could not satisfy this appetite, then authors whose alleged accounts of Asia were a blend of plagiarism and fantasy could be counted on to do so. Where most actual travelers were skeptical or modest in their statements about the existence of eastern monstrous races, late medieval artists and authors of fictional travelogues were happy to fill the gap.

Thus after around 1356, when the first version of Mandeville’s book entered circulation, the monster returned. The author first speaks of “diverse” people in Ethiopia, including those with one foot (which they use as a sunshade) and an ability to run at amazing speed upon that single foot, and others who as children have white hair that turns black as they age.¹¹⁴ He also lifts Odoric’s account of the giant testicles of Ormuz men and exaggerates his talk of pygmies, lowering their age at marriage from five years to six months.¹¹⁵ Mandeville’s most significant passage on monstrous races, which is also the most important found in any medieval work of travel literature, comes as an interpolation at the end of his otherwise broadly faithful repetition of Odoric’s account of the islands of southeast Asia between the descriptions of the human-eaters of Dondin (Andaman Island) who ingest their own kinfolk’s dead flesh and of the splendid realm of Manzi. Among the “diverse peoples” of the eastern isles are hideous giants with one eye who eat nothing but raw fish and flesh; men “of ugly stature and bad nature” lacking heads and with eyes in each shoulder and mouths in their chests; other headless people with eyes and mouth in the back of the shoulders; ugly people with a large top lip they use as a sunshade while sleeping; dwarfs with a tiny opening for a mouth that necessitates eating and drinking with a straw, and no tongues, who cannot speak but “make a sign one to another like monks or mutes”; people with horses’ feet who are swift runners and

overtake and eat wild beasts; a people who go on their hands and their feet like beasts, and are all hairy and climb in trees as lightly as monkeys; another of hermaphrodites; and a “people who always go about wonderfully on their knees; and it seems that they must fall down at each step, and they have eight toes on each foot.”¹¹⁶

As he journeys farther east, Mandeville speaks of yet more, such as the giants who live on an island beyond the terrible “Valley Perilous” who in addition to their horrible size (twenty-eight or thirty feet tall) lack all normal signs of civility.¹¹⁷ They wear nothing but the skins of beasts, eat no bread but only raw flesh and milk, and lack houses to live in. Worst of all, they like nothing better than to eat human flesh; no ship dares go near the island, lest the giants wade into the sea to take and devour those onboard. Even larger giants, of forty-five or fifty feet, live on a farther isle, it was said, but Mandeville and his companions had no desire to see them as no man might come to that island without soon being devoured. Some men have seen these giants (who also have sheep the size of cows) wading into shore with two men in each hand, eating their flesh raw. Nearby and to the south is an island of malicious people and cruel women with precious stones in the eyes who can kill a man simply by turning on him their basilisk glare. On another isle one finds the people who give their newly wedded wives to other men for deflowering (see Chapter 6). On yet another are women who make great moan when their children are born but celebrate with great joy when they die.¹¹⁸ In the same place, women who greatly love their husbands give themselves up to be burned with their husbands’ corpses along with their children, saying that the fire cleans them of all vices and thus readies them to go to their husbands in the other world (see Chapter 5).¹¹⁹ Their apparently perverse reactions to the births and deaths of their children arise from their sense that the world is an abode of pain, grief, and sadness, while death takes one to a Paradise where the rivers run with milk and honey, there is plenty in all things, and there is no labor or sorrow. As Mandeville’s description goes on these people seem less and less monstrous and more exemplary, with their choice of leader by election rather than birth and for his qualities rather than riches or nobility. It has a fair justice system that attends to the needs of the poor as well as the rich and is no respecter of persons, happily trying a king or noble for crimes just as readily as lesser folk. Beyond the islands of the virtuous Bragmanni and Gymnosophisti come yet more small people, a little larger than pygmies, who are of good color and shape, live off the smell of apples and lack reason, and another island of people covered in feathers who are equally mobile on water as on land and who eat raw flesh and raw fish.¹²⁰ The repetition of certain monstrous types will be apparent, though they shift geographical

location from author to author.



Figure 6. Men with heads like dogs on Andaman Island in the Gulf of Bengal. Marco Polo, *Livre des merveilles du monde*. Bibliothèque des arts decorative, Paris, France, fifteenth century. Photo credit: © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY.

It was through Mandeville and the countless copies of his book snapped up by medieval readers that representations of monsters reached something approaching a mass market. Johannes Witte de Hese simply carries on the tradition when he speaks of pygmies who are not only small but “misshapen [*difformes*],” one ell tall, living in caves, and eating not bread but plants “like beasts, living for twelve years at most.”¹²¹ Nearby are the One-Eyes (*monoculi*), who sometimes walk about underwater, are short, stocky, and strong, “eat other humans,” and have an eye in the middle of their foreheads “shining like a carbuncle.”¹²² Farther east, in “the remotest parts of the sea” past the inaccessible Earthly Paradise and a “rocky, utterly horrible island” said to be Purgatory itself, one encounters an island of “wild hairy people without any clothes,” a rocky mountain near which Syrens sang their perilous songs, and finally a land named “Amosona” for its queen, where Gog and Magog are imprisoned and the inhabitants include black, very white, and “extraordinarily shaped people ... having two faces on one head—one on the front side and one on the back side.”¹²³

Illustrators understood the monsters’ appeal. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, most manuscripts of eastern travel writing are not illuminated (for example, only 4 of the 140–50 surviving Marco Polo manuscripts have extensive cycles of illustration), but the few books

that are illustrated make much of the appeal of monsters. As Debra Higgs Strickland has detailed, the *Divisaments* illuminators simply insert images of monsters into the work contrary to the claims of the text they purport to illustrate. The celebrated Bodley 264 and BN fr 2810 *Livre des Merveilles* manuscripts from the early fifteenth century include images of blemmyae, sciapods, and Cyclopes, even though the accompanying text does not.¹²⁴ These books were made for courtly clients: BN fr 2810 was illuminated by one of the most celebrated miniaturists of the day (The Boucicaut Master) and presented by John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, to his uncle, John Duke de Berry, in January 1413. The Duke de Berry was fascinated by the wonders of the natural world; his private menagerie included a monkey, a camel, and an ostrich.¹²⁵ As a collector of “objects and bodies,” it is fitting that he should have been the recipients of one of the richest collections of representations of oriental monsters and marvels.¹²⁶ The particular attraction of the long passage from Mandeville quoted earlier is evident from the illustrations that accompany the section in certain manuscripts and early editions, such as London, BL MS Royal 17 C. XXXVIII and London BL MS Harley 3954, as well as the editions of Michael Velser (1481), von Diemerigen (1481), and (mostly copying from Velser) Wynkyn de Worde (1499).¹²⁷

In returning monsters to the Orient, Mandeville, Witte, and the illuminators restored the older Christian conception of the world. Unlike early modern explorers, their primary task was not to portray a world of peoples whose failings justified European conquest and possession but, I suggest, to give it back to God. Thus their vision encompassed the plurality of God’s creation. The wondrous diversity of life—human, animal, and vegetable—testified to His creative powers. Some of the monstrous peoples included in this vision were frightening and loathsome in their primitive state, others admirable in mores and governance; still others were morally neutral and fascinating only for their fabulous forms. In the end, it mattered less whether they were to be admired or reviled than that they retained the sense of the world as divinely diverse in its creation and contained, as *mappaemundi* often were, within the very body of Christ himself.

Conclusion

It is not that bodies are insignificant in medieval ethnographic descriptions of Asian peoples, but they do not matter in quite the ways one might assume. Authors and artists possessed the ancient and authoritative discourses of astrological influence and of monstrosity, but the former was found only moderately helpful in explicating Asian

bodies, and the latter was most often found misleading though it did provide fictional travelers with an invaluable imaginative resource. It was this they turned to when they wanted to emphasize the strange and create marvels out of the bodies of eastern peoples. The most reliable travelers seem to have found existing theories of bodily difference inadequate or wrong and so regularly cast these aside in favor of attempts at authentic description.

When Christopher Columbus made landfall in the Caribbean in October 1492, thinking that he had reached Asia, he was immediately on the lookout for monsters.¹²⁸ Much that he had ever heard or read about eastern lands had prepared him to find exotic varieties of humanity, but in place of the men with tails and people with one eye or dog's heads Columbus found well-formed and attractive people. In the absence of actually *seeing* any monsters he was prepared to believe that there were islands of fierce women, men with tails, dogheaded people, and anthropophagous peoples in nearby locations just out of sight. The ancient monsters took a long time finally to die (even in the late eighteenth century Blumenbach felt the need to dismiss them),¹²⁹ but with the European reconnaissance they slowly receded. Rabelais lampooned them; a 1562 costume book presented a radical image of a Cyclops that not only collapsed several ancient forms of monstrosity in one composite but also removed any residual seriousness, banishing it "to the purely festive realm of the comic, of excess and transgression" and in that moment removed all its reality.¹³⁰

As monstrous figures receded the concept of racial bodies moved into the void, but it was aimed at a target quite different from monster discourse. Through narrowing and containing the range of human types, and frequently ranking them on a scale of value, creators of race made peoples possessable. They created sets, taxonomies, graspable entities where before had been spectacular pluralities and thus remade the world for modern purposes. The extraordinary diversity of God's creation, as it had been perceived before colonialism, before Orientalism, was thus reduced, labeled, numbered, and ranked. The precolonial willingness to accept a world of diverse wonders that could be feared, admired, or simply marveled at gave way to a colonial urge to contain and possess.

Afterword: For a Precolonial Middle Ages

In one of his many important studies of European encounters with the peoples of America in the early modern period, Anthony Pagden places attitudes of the conquerors within an ancient lineage: “Europeans had always looked upon their own cultures as privileged, and upon all other cultures as to some degree inferior. There is nothing remarkable about this. Most people distinguish between equal clarity between themselves and all others.”¹ Pagden’s specific argument within that volume, concerning Europe’s long-running and ultimately failed attempt to comprehend the Americas within existing European intellectual traditions, is indubitably valuable and not under question. What is worthy of challenge is the assertion of the long lineage and universality of the sense of European superiority. Had Europeans really always looked on their own cultures as privileged and *all* others as inferior? Why should we accept this state of affairs as unremarkable? Have Europeans, along with most cultures, always drawn clear lines of distinction between themselves and others?

Before Orientalism has argued for a distinctive set of attitudes toward Asian peoples and cultures among European travel writers of the later medieval era, especially with regard to secular matters, which to a significant extent runs contrary to Pagden’s assertions. From the mid-thirteenth to early sixteenth century, writers who had traveled to the more distant reaches of the East—and other authors who attempted to distill in prose the experiences of travelers who reported their experiences—offered a diverse range of responses to oriental realms. These ranged from the pragmatic through the stigmatizing to the wondering and in some instances awestruck, depending not only on the location and motivations of the travelers but also on the agendas of those producing the written texts and interests of the readers who consumed them. The argument has been for a view of the Orient that drew on older European conventions of the wondrous Indies and fears of barbarism beyond the known horizon, yet added richness and complexity through the reports of the travelers who ventured deep into the eastern hemisphere. Their observations offered a far more diverse range of perspectives than can be covered by concepts of a European Self standing in contrast to an

oriental Other, or of a superior European civilization justified in criticism or domination of less advanced cultures.

The “Europe” produced through these various constructions of Orient, via a kind of cultural refraction, was a complex place. It possessed an openness and willingness to learn and be impressed that we have sometimes missed. It was disposed to take pleasure in descriptions of distant places. It rarely assumed its own superiority, except in matters of religion, or looked to justify conquest and possession. This Europe, indeed, never entirely disappeared. Even after the turn to imperialism and colonialism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, many Europeans retained a multiplicity of responses to different cultures. Although we may employ the benefit of hindsight in order to identify in medieval travel writing early hints at later European imperialist attitudes, my firm view is that the themes of conquest, possession, and a secular sense of superiority were not universal or dominant in medieval travelers’ tales of distant Easts. These points have been reiterated frequently enough throughout the book not to need further repetition here. Plenty of other scholars have made similar or related arguments.

If the book has one ultimate goal it is to encourage readers to ask why we should assume that there is “nothing remarkable” about one culture perceiving itself as distinct from and superior to others. Why not turn that argument on its head and say that such self-perception *should* be seen as remarkable and strange? If we do that, then we can begin to locate cultural sense of superiority in specific times and places. There are plenty of obvious candidates for that sensibility in global history, and postcolonial studies have energized scholars to investigate its many manifestations. The outlook generated by European economic and political dominance of its vast network of colonies from the eighteenth to mid-twentieth century was overwhelmingly Eurocentric, and its force is still very much with us. But it does not represent the only European perspective on the wider world. If a sense of superiority is perceived as particular and explicable through such motives as the urge to possess and the need to justify conquest, then we can turn our attention to perceptions of foreignness in contexts where such urges are absent. In relation to European history, such efforts could be gathered under a new heading: “precolonial studies.” This is a different (though in some ways related) project from the effort to demonstrate the relative weakness of Europe and dominance of Asian countries, notably China, in the premodern era.² A number of popular books have recently revived these aspects of “world systems theory” for a mass audience.³ The focus of precolonial studies would not be so much on Europe’s minor place in a global setting dominated by Mongolia or China but rather on the

diversity of its responses to foreign peoples before it had to justify colonial hegemony. Medieval European encounters with Asian peoples and cultures offer vivid illustrations of precolonial sensibilities; thus medievalists could potentially add important new dimensions to understandings of European perspectives on foreignness over a *longue durée*.

I end this book with both a sense of the value of such endeavors and of the humbleness of the present offering. In a recent essay Simon Gaunt concludes by positing certain “postcolonial futures” for medieval studies, and one could envisage the same criteria applying to its “precolonial futures.” He contends that scholars wishing to work in the field “need to work outside the framework of a single literary tradition,” given that traditional literary studies impose anachronistic generic boundaries on medieval cultures; that they also need “to work across different languages and to understand the dissemination and use of different languages in the Middle Ages.” He calls also for a return to manuscripts and possible revision of the accepted medieval canon, “rather than rely on critical editions produced in a tradition of modern national literary histories.” At the same time, though, scholars need to gain “theoretical sophistication” to help them engage with questions of how Europe emerged and how this early development contributes to longer histories including colonialism and postcolonialism.⁴ Though the present book was written out of similar impulses, no doubt it will be found wanting in many of the areas Gaunt identifies. I thus end with a frank acknowledgment of its shortcomings but hope it may make some contribution to a revived field.

It is hard to imagine the true impact of medieval travelers’ accounts of distant Easts. Now the world and its peoples are so thoroughly traversed, mapped, described, and photographed one may instantly call up Internet images of deepest Xinjiang province or the grasslands of Mongolia, and nothing more than money, time, and visas stand between the western traveler and the regions traversed by Carpini and his successors. Yet some of those books were among the most widely copied, translated, and disseminated works of the later medieval era. Medieval studies are largely Eurocentric in focus, many medieval people were aware of and indeed curious about worlds beyond the eastern horizon. Today, as the era of western hegemony appears to be drawing to a close, and China and India seem to be entering a new era of transcendence, it is time to pay more attention to attitudes toward Asian peoples and cultures that prevailed before modern colonialism and Orientalism.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Marco Polo speaks to Khubilai Khân, Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 2002), 135.

2. A vast literature exists on these subjects. Among important recent contributions see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009) and John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Some other major works include: Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960); R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); John V. Tolan, ed., *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1996); Jeremy Cohen, ed., *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christianity*, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 11 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996); John Christian Laurenson and Cary J. Nederman, eds., *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto, eds., *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perceptions of Other* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 113–46; Rosamund Allen, ed., *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050–1550* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); and Josiah Blackmore, *Moorings: Portuguese Expansion and the Writing of Africa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

3. Tolan, *Saracens*, 18. He directs our attention to comments by William Green on similar tendencies in Rabbinic Judaism, as well as Jonathan Smith's remark, "The radically 'other' is merely 'other'; the proximate 'other' is problematic, and hence, of supreme interest" (*Saracens*, 290n76).

4. See in particular Tolan, *Saracens*; Akbari, *Idols*; Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Amilcare A. Iannucci (with the assistance of John Tulk), eds., *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); and Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The "Travels" of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

5. Christopher LaMonica, "Colonialism," *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, <http://www.oxfordbibliographiesonline.com> (accessed 23 April 2012).

6. Jurgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Introduction*, trans. Shelley L. Frisch (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1997), 16–17.

7. *Ibid.*, 4–12.

8. For example, Joshua Prawer, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: European Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1972); Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229–1492* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987); Robert Bartlett and Angus Mackay, eds., *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University

Press, 1993); David Abulafia, *Commerce and Conquest in the Mediterranean, 1100–1500* (London: Variorum, 1993). However, it is worth noting, as Simon Gaunt points out in his incisive review essay, “Can the Middle Ages Be Postcolonial?” *Comparative Literature* 61 (2009): 160–76, at 164, that “colonization” is not necessarily the best term for movements such as those of the Norman aristocracy into England after 1066 and, subsequently, Anglo-Norman elite migrations into Wales and Ireland. He prefers Bartlett’s “aristocratic diaspora” (*Making of Europe*, 24–59). Bartlett, almost in passing, defines “cultural symptoms of colonialism” as “small immigrant élites with close ties to the metropolis and large discontented populations of a different language and religious affiliation” (*Making of Europe*, 185).

9. The foundational volume was Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000). Gaunt’s recent review essay “Can the Middle Ages Be Postcolonial?” examines the potential and problems inherent in medieval postcolonial studies; a more favorable survey is Lisa Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). Medieval postcolonial studies includes work by scholars of medievalism who argue that “the Middle Ages” itself has been constructed as “Other” by Renaissance and later scholars in contrast with postmedieval (humanist, enlightenment, modern) identities. Two such studies are Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) and John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). For works focusing more on the historical setting of medieval expansion and cross-cultural interaction, see Michelle R. Warren, “Making Contact: Postcolonial Perspectives Through Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britannie*,” *Arthuriana* 8 (1998): 115–34; Kathleen Davis, “National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking About the Nation,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 611–37; essays by Bowers, Cohen, Davis, Heng, Robertson, Sponsler, and Tomasch in *Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Cohen; Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100–1300* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); essays by Karkov and Kinoshita in *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*, ed. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); David Wallace, *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); and essays by Hiatt and Harper in *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, ed. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). A fuller bibliography is available in Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies*.

10. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1965); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” *Subaltern Studies* 4 (1985): 330–63; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. Overviews include Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998); Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

11. Of Cohen’s edited book, Stephen Howe said, “a recent book of literary studies is rather mind-bendingly titled *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*,” in *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.

12. Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles, eds., *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Nicholas Howe, “Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void,” and Seth Lerer, “‘On fagne flor’: The Postcolonial *Beowulf*,” in *Postcolonial Approaches*, ed. Kabir and Williams; Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

13. David Morgan, *The Mongols*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 130–31.

14. On Catholic missions to Asia in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, see, among others, E. Randolph Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975); Jean Richard, *La Pape et les missions d’Orient au Moyen Age (XIIIe–XVe siècles)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1977); James D. Ryan, “Conversion

vs. Baptism? European Missionaries in Asia in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” in *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 146–67; and part 2 of Roland Jacques, *Des nations à évangéliser: Genèse de la mission catholique pour l'Extrême-Orient* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2003). Further works are cited in Chapter 2.

15. Daniel, *Franciscan Concept of Mission*, 3–4.

16. For example, Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) examined Europeans' interaction with, knowledge about, and positive perspectives on Asia up to around 1800, focusing on 1500–1800 but with valuable chapters on ancient, medieval, and early Renaissance contexts (vol. 1, chs. 1–2). Many studies of Marco Polo's book have emphasized the complex and often admiring view presented: see John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999) and Akbari and Iannucci, eds., *Marco Polo and the Encounter*. Higgins's valuable study of the “Book” of “Sir John Mandeville,” *Writing East*, emphasizes its diverse intentions and messages. The concluding chapter of Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India Through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), which deals with Marco Polo and Niccolò dei Conti along with a number of early modern European descriptions of India up to 1625, is subtitled “Before Orientalism” (388–98). Robert Markley's study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English perspectives on China, Japan, and southeast Asia, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), emphasizes the extent to which up to the early eighteenth century prominent English writers were “dazzled” by the economic and technological superiority of the eastern empires.

17. Georges Duby, *Art and Society in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 43.

18. George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, ed. D. J. A. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); J. A. Boyle, “The Alexander Romance in the East and West,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 60 (1977): 13–27; Richard Stoneman, ed. and trans., *The Greek Alexander Romance* (New York: Penguin, 1991).

19. J. R. S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3; Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, bk. 1, 12–15; M. Cary and E. H. Warmington, *The Ancient Explorers*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1963), ch. 4; Mortimer Wheeler, *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1954), part 3. See also Folker E. Reichert, *Begegnungen mit China: Die Entdeckung Ostasiens im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1992), ch. 1. Chapters 1–7 of Phillips's *Medieval Expansion* supply essential information on European travel to Asia from late Roman times to the later Middle Ages with helpful annotated bibliographies; see also James Muldoon, “Travel and Travelers,” *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/> (accessed 1 April 2012). Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), offers a survey from a global perspective.

20. Pomponius Mela, *Pomponius Mela's Description of the World*, trans. F. E. Romer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), bk. 3, ch. 60.

21. Pliny, *Natural History*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham et al., 10 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1938–1963), vol. 2, bk. 6, ch. 24, part 88.

22. Mela's *Description of the World*, trans. Romer, bk. 3, chs. 63–65.

23. Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Travels in the Middle Ages*, with introductions by Michael A. Signer, Marcus Nathan Adler, and A. Asher (Malibu, CA: Joseph Simon/Pangloss Press, 1993), 123–25.

24. *The Chronicle of Novgorod, 1016–1471*, trans. Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes, Camden Society, 3rd ser., 25 (London, 1914), 64. See C. W. Connell, “Western Views of the Origins of the ‘Tartars’: An Example of the Influence of Myth in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3 (1973): 115–37 for European fear of Mongols and origins of the word “Tartar,” with its associations with Hell and the Anti-Christ.

25. Gregory G. Guzman, “Mongols (Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries),” in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg, with Scott D. Westrem and Gregory G. Guzman (New York: Garland, 2000), 412. J. J. Saunders concurs, emphasizing the weakness of and divisions between European powers: “Had the Mongol offensive not been abruptly broken off in 1242, it is most

unlikely that the powers of Europe would have combined in a common defensive effort; Latin Christendom would have suffered the fate of China and Persia.” *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (London: Routledge, 1971), 89. There are dissenters to this view. Denis Sinor suggests Batu withdrew his forces after entering Hungary because the grazing lands were not sufficient to sustain the Mongol army’s horses: “Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History,” *Oriens Extremus* 19 (1972): 171–83, reprinted in Denis Sinor, *Inner Asia and Its Contacts with Medieval Europe* (London: Variorum, 1977).

26. Many have written on the rise of the Mongols and their threat to Europe. A sample includes I. de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 41–88; Saunders, *History of the Mongol Conquests*; Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, 62–82; Morgan, *The Mongols*; Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1–21; Felicitas Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden: Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. bis in das 15. Jahrhundert* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1994); Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005); and Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests in World History* (London: Reaktion, 2012). The irony of Pax Mongolica is well expressed by David Morgan: “If the concept is derived from the *Pax Romana*, the most appropriate comment belongs rightly to a Roman historian, Tacitus, speaking through the mouth of a British chieftain: ‘Solitudinem faciunt, et pacem appellant’—‘they make a desolation, and call it peace’” (*The Mongols*, 83).

27. The authors, with the approximate dates of their written works in parenthesis, are John of Plano Carpini (c. 1247), Benedict the Pole (c. 1247), Andrew of Longjumeau (c. 1247 and c. 1251), Simon of St. Quentin (c. 1247), William of Rubruck (c. 1255), Marco Polo (c. 1298), Ricold of Monte Croce (after 1301), John of Monte Corvino (1305 and 1306), Hetoum of Armenia (1307), Peregrine of Castello (1318), Andrew of Perugia (1326), Jordan Catala of Sévérac (1321, 1323, c. 1330), author of “The Book of the Estate of the Great Caan” (c. 1330), Odoric of Pordenone (c. 1330), John of Marignolli (c. 1356), “Sir John Mandeville” (c. 1360), Ruy Gonzáles de Clavijo (after 1406), Johannes Witte de Hese (c. 1424), Johann Schiltberger (c. 1428–30), Niccolò dei Conti (1448), Hieronimo de Santo Stefano (c. 1500), and Ludovico de Varthema (1510). Associated works include *The Letter of Prester John* (c. 1165), and Francesco Balducci Pegolotti’s book for Florentine merchants (c. 1340). Romances are not included because of their different generic expectations.

28. Reichert, *Begegnungen mit China*, 287–93, provides a list of 125 Europeans noted in east and central Asian contexts between 1242 and 1448.

29. Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 20 vols. (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905–7), vol. 11.

30. C. R. Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography*, 3 vols. (London: Frowde, 1897–1906); Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1; de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*; G. V. Scammel, *The World Encompassed: The First Maritime Empires, c. 800–1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*; Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); [J. R.] Seymour Phillips, “The Outer World of the European Middle Ages,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). A new series republishes classic and key articles dealing with medieval exploration and expansion within and beyond Europe: James Muldoon and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, general eds., *The Expansion of Latin Europe, 1000–1500*, 14 vols. projected (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2008–ongoing), including Joan-Pau Rubiés, ed., *Medieval Ethnographies: European Perceptions of the World Beyond* (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2009).

31. For example, Boies Penrose, *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance, 1420–1620* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952); J. R. Hale, *Renaissance Exploration* (New York: Norton, 1968); Carlo Cipolla, *European Culture and Overseas Expansion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); J. H. Parry, *The Discovery of the Sea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Ronald H. Fritze, *New Worlds: The Great Voyages of Discovery, 1400–1600* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002).

32. A brilliantly concise contribution in this vein is [J. R.] Seymour Phillips, “European Expansion Before Columbus: Causes and Consequences,” *Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History* 5 (1993): 45–59.

33. Particularly relevant works include Lerner, *Marco Polo*; Akbari and Iannucci, eds., *Marco Polo and the Encounter*; Marianne O’Doherty, *The Indies and the Medieval West: Thought*,

Report, *Imagination* (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming). For some important books by German scholars, see, for example, Reichert, *Begegnungen mit China*; Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden*; Wilhelm Baum, *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes: Rom, Byzanz und die Christen des Orients im Mittelalter* (Klagenfurt: Verlag Kitab, 1999); Wilhelm Baum and Raimund Senoner, eds., *Indien und Europa im Mittelalter: Die Eingliederung des Kontinents in das europäische Bewußtsein bis ins 15. Jahrhundert* (Klagenfurt: Kitab, 2000); and Marina Münkler, *Erfahrung des Fremden: die Beschreibung Ostasiens in den Augenzeugenberichten des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2000).

34. Medieval European perspectives on Asian religions have begun to be addressed in various existing works, such as in the studies by German scholars listed in note 33.

CHAPTER 1

1. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978; reprinted with a new afterword, 1995), 2–3, quote at 3 (emphasis added). See also Edward W. Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered,” *Race & Class* 27 (1985): 1–15.

2. Lucy K. Pick, “Edward Said, *Orientalism* and the Middle Ages,” *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999): 265–71 at 265–66. Her essay is an introduction to a special issue devoted to Orientalism and medieval studies.

3. Among numerous studies of Said’s book, a major critique is offered by Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006). See also (to sample a vast literature) C. F. Beckingham, review of *Orientalism* by Edward W. Said, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 42 (1979): 562–64; James Clifford, “On Orientalism,” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 255–76; the essays (ranging from pro to con to mixed) in A. L. McAfie, ed., *Orientalism: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); and *American Historical Review* forum, “*Orientalism* Twenty Years On,” special issue, 105 (2000): 1204–49 with essays by Andrew J. Rotter, K. E. Fleming, and Kathleen Biddick. Responses up to c. 2002 are discussed in Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 182–214, and another recent rebuke is Ibn Warraq’s *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007). Scholars who have queried whether the theory applies to the far Orient include Robert A. Kapp, ed., “Review Symposium: Edward Said’s *Orientalism*,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 39 (1980): 481–517; Simon Lays (Pierre Ryckmans), “Orientalism and Sinology,” in *The Burning Forest: Essays on Chinese Culture and Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985), 95–99; and John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

4. Dawn Odell, “Is This the Orient?” *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999): 322–35, quote at 326–27.

5. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), xi.

6. The vast range of scholarship and opinions on this subject is apparent from the discussion thread at <http://www.h-net.org/~asia/threads/thrdorientalism.html>, where a large number of relevant items are cited. To take some examples, see Stefan Tanaka, *Japan’s Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Chandreyee Niyogi, ed., *Reorienting Orientalism* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2006); Hayden J. A. Bellenoit, *Missionary Education and Empire in Late Colonial India, 1860–1920* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007); Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon, eds., *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s–1940s: Portrayal of the East* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Amit Ray, *Negotiating the Modern: Orientalism and Indianness in the Anglophone World* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Michael S. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770–1880* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

7. Odell, “Is This the Orient?”

8. Said, *Orientalism*, 25–26. Though born in Jerusalem, Said had Christian Lebanese parents and was brought up in Egypt. Some of his critics have queried his adoption of a Palestinian subjectivity: e.g., Irwin, *Lust of Knowing*, 277–78.

9. Akbari, *Idols*, esp. 5–11 for a discussion of “Orientalism” in this context. Tolan, *Saracens*, offers another respectful but judicious engagement with Said’s concept in relation to medieval perceptions of Islam. In addition (although a number of the following works interrogate Said’s central terms and concepts), see Sheila Delany, “Geographies of Desire: Orientalism in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*,” *Chaucer Yearbook* 1 (1992): 1–32; Susan Schibanoff, “Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism and Heresy in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Exemplaria* 8 (1996): 59–96; Robert L. A. Clark, “Queering Orientalism: The East as Closet in Said, Ackerley, and the Medieval Christian West,” *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999): 336–49; Jenna Mead, “Reading by Said’s Lantern: Orientalism and Chaucer’s *Treatise on the Astrolabe*,” *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999): 350–57; Carol F. Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance* (Woodbridge: Sutton, 2003); Kathryn Powell, “Orientalist Fantasy in the Poetic Dialogues of *Solomon and Saturn*,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 34 (2005): 117–43; and Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism*.

10. Akbari, *Idols*, II. Elsewhere she has explored this discursive division, notably comparing descriptions of rivers and other waterways in Mandeville’s *Book* and Marco Polo’s *Divisament*. Mandeville’s preoccupation with “sites which are eternally significant in Christian salvation history” and Polo’s “series of interchangeable, variable centres of trade and exchange” represent fundamentally different worldviews. “While preferring to keep “Orientalism” for categorizing these works, she finds them quite unlike one another in their implicit constructions of different “Orients.” See Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “Currents and Currency in Marco Polo’s *Devisement dou monde* and *The Book of John Mandeville*,” in *Marco Polo and the Encounter*, ed. Akbari and Iannucci, 110–30, quotes at 111. While Mandeville’s spiritual motives are also evident in certain themes examined in the present book—notably his depiction of monstrous peoples (discussed in Chapter 8)—his reliance on earlier travel books (especially Odoric’s) for the far eastern portions of his narrative also modifies the extent to which one can comfortably place his work in opposition to that of other travelers.

11. Kathleen Biddick, “Coming Out of Exile: Dante on the Orient(alism) Express,” *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 1234–49, quote at 1237 (a different version is in *Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Cohen, 35–52).

12. Said, *Orientalism*, 49–50, citing Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, 72. Robert Irwin makes a case for the sixteenth or early seventeenth century (*Lust of Knowing*, 6–7, 47–48). Said revised this aspect of his definition to the “early nineteenth century” (“Orientalism Reconsidered,” 2).

13. Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, 72–73; Pick, “Edward Said, *Orientalism* and the Middle Ages,” 266–67, and see the works cited there.

14. See note 48 below. A detailed discussion of the development of academic Orientalism is Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

15. T. H. Barrett, *Singular Listlessness: A Short History of Chinese Books and British Scholars* (London: Wellsweep Press, 1989), 73 (my thanks to Dr. Richard Phillips for this reference). Also Paul Demiéville, “Aperçu historique des études sinologiques en France,” *Acta Asiatica* 2 (1966): 56–110; William W. L. Wan, *Sinology in the United Kingdom and Germany: Selections from Shih chiai ko kuo Han hsieh yen chiu lun wen chi* (*Symposium on the Sinological Study over the World*) (Honolulu: East-West Centre, 1967); and Herbert Franke, *Sinology at German Universities* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1968), 7–11.

16. Irwin, *Lust of Knowing*, 147.

17. <http://www.orinst.ox.ac.uk/ea/chinese/> (accessed 10 June 2008); Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 76–77, 79.

18. Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 92–96.

19. See Chapter 3, 53–54.

20. David Woodward, “Medieval *Mappaemundi*,” in *The History of Cartography*, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987–98), vol. 1, 286–370, with a list of major surviving medieval *mappaemundi* on 359–67. See also Kenneth Nebenzahl, *Mapping the Silk Road and Beyond: 2,000 Years of Exploring the East* (London: Phaidon, 2004), 26–29.

21. Barbara Obrist, “Wind Diagrams and Medieval Cosmology,” *Speculum* 72 (1997): 33–84.

22. Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation,”

in *Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Cohen, 19–34, quote at 20. Also relevant is her “Alexander in the Orient: Bodies and Boundaries in the *Roman de toute chevalerie*,” in *Postcolonial Approaches*, ed. Kabir and Williams, 105–26.

23. For one mid-thirteenth-century source that does, however, identify Europe with the “Occident,” see Chapter 3, 62.

24. Akbari, *Idols*, 35–50. Akbari and Iannucci, eds., *Marco Polo and the Encounter*, uses the “East/West” binary as “strategic essentialism” to frame the collection (Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “Introduction: East, West, and In-between,” 3). In the same volume, Susan Whitfield’s essay challenges the validity of a number of scholarly conventions structuring histories of Central Asia and China, not least the dichotomy of “East” and “West”: “The Perils of Dichotomous Thinking: A Case of Ebb and Flow Rather than East and West,” 247–61.

25. John Kirtland Wright, *The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades: A Study in the History of Medieval Science and Tradition in Western Europe*, rev. ed. (New York: Dover, 1965), 177; George H. T. Kimble, *Geography in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1938), 157–58.

26. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, 203–4. A detailed discussion of multiple medieval views of “the Indies” is in O’Doherty, *The Indies*.

27. Jean de Mandeville [“Sir John Mandeville”], *Le Livre des Merveilles du Monde*, ed. Christiane Deluz, Sources d’Histoire Médiévale Publiées par l’Institut de Recherche et d’Histoire des Textes, 31 (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2000), ch. 17, 305. Deluz’s edition is based on the Insular (Anglo-Norman) version, which she persuasively contends to be the earliest on linguistic grounds. For the passage in the Continental (French) version, which has been thought by others to be the earliest, see Malcolm Letts, ed. and trans., *Mandeville’s Travels: Texts and Translations*, 2 vols., Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., no. 101 (London, 1953), vol. 2, ch. 17, 318.

28. Jordan of Sévérac, *Mirabilia descripta: The Wonders of the East*, trans. Henry Yule, Hakluyt Society, 1st ser., no. 31 (London, 1863), 11n1. Poggio Bracciolini, *De varietate fortunae: Edizione critica con introduzione e commento*, ed. Outi Merisalo, Annales Academia Scientiarum Fennica, ser. B, no. 275 (Helsinki, 1993), 166, lines 321–23; English translation of Niccolò’s narrative in *Travelers in Disguise: Narratives of Eastern Travel by Poggio Bracciolini and Ludovico de Varthema*, trans. John Winter Jones, revised with introduction by Lincoln Davis Hammond (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 25.

29. Honorius Augustodunensis, *Imago Mundi*, ed. Valerie I. J. Flint, in *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 49 (1982): 7–153, quote at 53–54.

30. P. McGurk and Ann Knock, “The Marvels of the East,” in *An Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany: British Library Cotton Tiberius B.V Part 1, Together with Leaves from British Library Cotton Nero D. II*, ed. P. McGurk, D. N. Dumville, M. R. Godden, and Ann Knock (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1983). See also M. R. James, ed., *Marvels of the East: A Full Reproduction of the Three Known Copies, with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Roxburghe Club, 1929) and Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 47–86.

31. McGurk et al., eds., *Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany*, fols. 82, 83v, 85r, 86r.

32. Pietro [Pierre] d’Ailly, *Imago mundi: Texte latin et traduction française des quatre traités cosmographiques de d’Ailly et les notes marginales de Christophe Colomb*, ed. and trans. Edmond Buron, 3 vols. (Paris: Maisonneuve frères, 1930), ch. 16.

33. Such responses are summed up in Thomas Hahn, “The Indian Tradition in Western Medieval Intellectual History,” *Viator* 9 (1978): 213–34, reprinted in *Medieval Ethnographies*, ed. Rubiés, 209–30.

34. For the Latin text, see “Giraldus Cambrensis *In Topographia Hibernie*: Text of the First Recension,” ed. John J. O’Meara, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, section C, vol. 52 (1948–50), 113–78, quote at 132–33; for translation, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. John J. O’Meara, 2nd ed. (Mountrath: Dolmen Press 1982), 54.

35. Giraldus, *Top. Hib.* I.27–32 (O’Meara ed., 132–34; O’Meara trans., 54–56).

36. Said, *Orientalism*, 38–40.

37. Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, rev. ed. (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1999), esp. ch. 4.

38. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4, 153–77; English translation in *Travelers in Disguise*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 3–45.

39. Said, *Orientalism*, 42.

40. Ibid., 5.
41. Irwin speaks of “the malign influence of Said’s *Orientalism*, which has been surprisingly effective in discrediting and demoralizing an entire tradition of scholarship” (*Lust of Knowing*, 276).
42. Irwin, *Lust of Knowing*, 4.
43. Ibid., 130.
44. Ibid., 133.
45. Ibid., 217, 219, 238, 240, 245.
46. Ibid., 298.
47. Said, *Orientalism*, 73.
48. “Le décretloi du 10 germinal An III (30 mars 1795), promulgué sous l’impulsion de Lakanal, crée, dans l’enceinte de la Bibliothèque Nationale, l’École spéciale des Langues orientales, avec pour mission d’enseigner des langues orientales vivantes ‘d’une utilité reconnue pour la politique et le commerce,’” http://www.inalco.fr/ina_gabarit_rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=7 (accessed 9 June 2008).
49. Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 85. On the pragmatic focus of British Sinology, see also 119–20.
50. “Charter of Incorporation,” <http://www.soas.ac.uk/soasnet/governance/standingorders/standingorderscharterarticles/standing-orders-charter-and-articles.html> (accessed 9 June 2008).
51. Irwin, *Lust of Knowing*, 219, also 240.
52. Ibid., 238.
53. Ibid.
54. For more on such matters, see Lawrence Rosen, “Orientalism Revisited: Edward Said’s Unfinished Critique,” *Boston Review* (January/February 2007), <http://bostonreview.net/BR32.i/rosen.php> (accessed 11 June 2008); Maya Jasanoff, “Before and After Said,” *London Review of Books* 28, no. 11 (2006): 14–15.
55. A general account is given in G. R. Crone, *The Discovery of the East* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), 27–45. The memoirs of Gaspar Correia relating to Vasco da Gama are available in a Hakluyt Society translation: Gaspar Correa [sic], *The Three Voyages of Vasco da Gama and His Viceroyalty from the Lendas da India of Gaspar Correa*, ed. Henry E. J. Stanley, Hakluyt Society, 1st ser., vol. 42 (London, 1869), as well as more recent Portuguese editions.
56. D. K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1982), 373.
57. For overviews and discussion of key terms (such as colonization, colonialism, and imperialism), see K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498–1945* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1953); Fieldhouse, *Colonial Empires*; D. K. Fieldhouse, *Colonialism, 1870–1945: An Introduction* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1981); H. L. Wesseling, *The European Colonial Empires, 1815–1919*, trans. Diane Webb (Harlow: Pearson, 2004); and the introduction, p. 4.
58. Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, 388–98. Compare Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India, 1600–1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
59. Markley, *Far East and the English Imagination*. Two broad surveys of western views of China—Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan’s Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: Norton, 1998) and Mackerras, *Western Images of China*—concur on this point.
60. A turning point was Clement XI’s encyclical *Ex illa die* of 1715 condemning the assimilation of Chinese rites and vocabulary in Catholic contexts, as had been practiced by the Jesuits from the time of Matteo Ricci’s mission in the late sixteenth century. However, the “Chinese rites controversy,” as it is generally known, had already been the subject for Catholic debate for some decades and would not be resolved until Benedict XIV’s decree *Ex quo singulari* of 1742. See Charbonnier, *Christians in China*, 246–70.

CHAPTER 2

1. For biographical details on John of Plano Carpini see Enrico Menestò’s introduction to the edition, *Historia Mongalorum, in Storia dei Mongoli*, ed. Enrico Menestò et al. (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 1989), 49–67 and de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, 89–111. Subsequent references to Carpini’s text will be by chapter and paragraph number

with page references to Menestò's edition and the translation in *Mission to Asia: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, ed. Christopher Dawson and trans. "a nun of Stanbrook Abbey" (New York: Harper and Row, 1966; published in 1955 as *The Mongol Mission*). This format hereafter applies to most references to key primary sources.

2. de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, 90; Giordano's text partly quoted in *Storia dei Mongoli*, ed. Menestò et al., 55n23.

3. Carpini, *Historia*, IX.21–28 (Menestò, 313–17; Dawson, 58–61, quote at 58).

4. Benedict the Pole, *Relatio*, in *Sinica Franciscana: Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII et XIV*, ed. Anastasius van den Wyngaert (Quaracchi-Florence: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1929), vol. 1, 137 (Dawson, 80).

5. Ruy González de Clavijo, *Relación de la embajada de Enrique III al Gran Tamorlán*, ed. Francisco Lopez Estrada (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe, 1952), 136; for translation, see *Clavijo: Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403–1406*, trans. Guy le Strange (London: Routledge, 1928), 179–80.

6. Carpini, *Historia*, IX.46, 47 (Menestò, 329, 330; Dawson, 69, 70).

7. de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, 87.

8. Paul Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la Papauté," *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 23 (1922–23): 1–28; 24 (1924): 225–335; 28 (1931–32): 3–84; de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, 76–124; Richard, *Papauté et les missions d'Orient*, 70–75.

9. Peter Jackson with David Morgan, introduction to William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khân Möngke, 1253–1255*, trans. Peter Jackson, Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., no. 173 (London, 1990), 25.

10. A valuable consideration of these works as ethnography, which grants pride of place to Carpini, is J. K. Hyde, "Ethnographers in Search of an Audience," in *Literacy and Its Uses: Studies on Late Medieval Italy*, ed. Daniel Waley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 162–216 at 172–83, recently reprinted in *Medieval Ethnographies*, ed. Rubiés, 65–119.

11. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, Rolls Series, no. 57, 7 vols. (London: Longman, 1872–82), vol. 3, 488–89; vol. 4, 76–77, 109–12, 112–19, 131–33, 270–77, 386–89; vol. 6, 75–76, 77, 84, 113–16. English translations are available in J. A. Giles, *English History, from the Year 1235 to 1273*, 3 vols. (London: H. G. Bohn, 1852–54). A helpful discussion of these and other contemporary sources is J. J. Saunders, "Matthew Paris and the Mongols," in *Essays in Medieval History, Presented to Bertie Wilkinson*, ed. T. A. Sandquist and M. R. Powicke (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 116–32.

12. Edited in Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1, 133–43 (Dawson, 79–84).

13. See Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, ed. Johann Mentelin (Strasbourg, 1473–76), bks. 30–32. The sections relating specifically to Simon's source are extracted in *Simon de Saint-Quentin: Histoire des Tartares*, ed. Jean Richard (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1965). See three articles by Gregory G. Guzman: "Simon of Saint-Quentin and the Dominican Mission to the Mongol Baiju: A Reappraisal," *Speculum* 46 (1971): 232–49; "Simon of Saint-Quentin as Historian of the Mongols and Seljuk Turks," *Medievalia et humanistica* 49, n.s. 3 (1972): 155–78; and "The Encyclopedist Vincent of Beauvais and His Mongol Extracts from John of Plano Carpini and Simon of St. Quentin," *Speculum* 49 (1974): 287–307.

14. See in particular Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. Luard, vol. 6, 112–16, vol. 5, 87; Jean de Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, ed. Natalis de Wailly (Paris: Hachette, 1874), 47–48, 168–75; *The Life of St. Louis*, trans. René Hague (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 56–58, 144–49.

15. The manuscripts are described in Enrico Menestò, "La tradizione manoscritta," in *Storia dei Mongoli*, ed. Menestò et al., 100–216.

16. C. de Bridia, *Hystoria Tartarorum*, ed. Alf Önnersfors (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967); C. de Bridia, *The Tartar Relation*, trans. George D. Painter in *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation*, ed. R. A. Skelton, Thomas E. Marston, and George D. Painter, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). Kirsten A. Seaver, *Maps, Myths and Men: The Story of the Vinland Map* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004) gives a detailed account of the map and associated controversies. Gregory Guzman discusses a second copy of the *Tartar Relation* in "The Vinland Map Controversy and the Discovery of a Second Version of *The Tartar Relation*: The Authenticity of the 1339 Text," *Terrae Incognitae* 38 (2006): 19–25.

17. Maddison raises doubts about the use of the initial "C" rather than a full Christian name and about dating of Mongol terms but portrays himself as playing a devil's advocate role: F. R. Maddison, "A Sceptical View of the Tartar Relation," in "The Strange Case of the Vinland Map: A Symposium," ed. H. G. Wallis, *Geographical Journal* 140 (1974): 183–211 at

187–91. Guzman’s discovery (see “Vinland Map Controversy”) obviates the need for an authenticity debate.

18. See Gregory G. Guzman’s entry on “Benedict the Pole” and Charles W. Connell’s on “Bridia, C. de,” in *Trade, Travel and Exploration*, ed. Friedman and Figg, 57–58, 74–75.

19. Enrico Menestò, “Giovanni di Pian di Carpine: Da Compagno di Francesco a Diplomatico Presso 1 Tartari,” in *Storia dei Mongoli*, ed. Menestò et al., 56.

20. *Ibid.*, 57.

21. Carpini, *Historia*, IX.49–52 (Menestò, 330–33; Dawson, 70–72).

22. Quoted in Menestò, “Giovanni di Pian di Carpine,” 64.

23. Maria Cristiana Lungarotti, “Le due redazioni dell’*Historia Mongalorum*,” in *Storia dei Mongoli*, ed. Menestò et al., 79–92.

24. de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, 125–43. For background, see also Jackson and Morgan, introduction to *Mission of Friar William*, trans. Jackson. English translations include those by Rockhill, “a nun of Stanbrook Abbey” in Dawson’s *Mission to Asia*, both listed in the bibliography, and Jackson, just cited. Wyngaert’s edition and Jackson’s translation are used in the present work.

25. “I was always provided with a strong mount in view of my very great weight.” Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXI.6 (Wyngaert, 220–21; Jackson, 140).

26. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXII.1 (Wyngaert, 221; Jackson, 141).

27. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXVIII.4, 11 (Wyngaert, 245, 247; Jackson, 173, 175). Carpini said that he had seen slaves of the Mongols very scantily dressed and who had lost toes and fingers to frostbite. *Historia*, VII.12 (Menestò, 292; Dawson, 43).

28. The Rubruck manuscripts are listed in *Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Jackson, 52. The versions owned by Bury St. Edmunds, St. Mary’s, and Norwich Cathedral Priory are now Cambridge, Corpus Christi College [CCC] 66A, fols. 67–110; Cambridge, CCC 181, fols. 321–98; and Cambridge, CCC 407, fols. 69–91.

29. Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, ed. John Henry Bridges, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897–1900), vol. 1, 301–2; translation in *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, trans. Robert Belle Burke, 2 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000, reprinted from the edition of 1928), vol. 1, 320–21. For Bacon’s direct references to Rubruck, see Burke’s translation, vol. 1, 322–23, 374, 381, 385; vol. 2, 789, 792, 806.

30. Bacon, *Opus Majus* (Bridges, vol. 1, 302–3; Burke, vol. 1, 321–23).

31. Cambridge, CCC 66A, item 18.

32. Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, ed. and trans. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot (hereafter Moule and Pelliot), 2 vols. (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1938), vol. 1, 40, 509–16. Consuelo Wager Dutschke counted 135 copies, excluding print copies and post-1500 manuscripts: “Francesco Pipino and the Manuscripts of Marco Polo’s ‘Travels’” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1993), 6, 9, and listed in her appendix by place 263–75, by version, 276–82, and by description, 283–489. Larner, *Marco Polo*, speaks of 150 manuscripts, noting that counts vary depending on whether one includes fragments (106, 208n3), and pages 109–15 discuss variations between the chief versions. I use Ronchi’s edition of the F text (that is, the Franco-Italian version usually taken as the earliest) in her volume, which also includes the Tuscan version, *Milione. Le Divisament dou Monde. Il Milione nelle redazioni Toscana e franco-italiana*, ed. Gabriella Ronchi (Milan: Mondadori, 1982), and Moule and Pelliot’s translation (*Description*, vol. 1) as it has the benefit of attempting to represent variant readings from the major manuscript traditions within its main text. I follow the base text (F, in Roman type in Moule and Pelliot, from Paris, Bib. Nat. fr. 1116, c. 1310) but cite identified variants (marked in italics in Moule and Pelliot), where appropriate. An earlier standard edition of F is *Il Milione*, ed. Luigi Foscolo Benedetto (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1928), which also includes foundational work on the manuscripts. For more on the manuscripts, see Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 40–52; John Critchley, *Marco Polo’s Book* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992), 157–77; Peter Jackson, “Marco Polo and His ‘Travels,’” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61 (1998): 84–85; and Larner, *Marco Polo*, 58, 184–86. A stemma of major variants is in Christine Gadrat, “Le rôle de Venise dans la diffusion du livre de Marco Polo (XIV^e—début XVI^e siècle),” *Médiévales: Langue Textes Histoire* 58 (2010): 63–78 at 65. The Old French *Devisement* has been edited under the lead of Philippe Ménard (Geneva: Droz, 2001–9). The “Yule-Cordier” edition, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian*, ed. Henry Yule, 3rd ed. rev. by Henri Cordier (London: John Murray, 1871, 1875, and 1903), reprinted in 2 vols. with Cordier’s *Notes and Addenda* originally published in 1920

(New York: Dover, 1993), is still helpful for extensive notes but outdated in other respects. See also Ronald Latham's translation, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (London: Penguin, 1958), based on the F and Z versions.

33. Akbari, introduction to *Marco Polo and the Encounter*, ed. Akbari and Iannucci, 9.

34. Hiroshi Watanabe has supplied this for scholarship and editions down to 1983: *Marco Polo Bibliography, 1477–1983* (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1986), listing 2,337 titles. John Larner's masterly *Marco Polo*, ch. 2, summarizes the state of scholarly knowledge and deduction about Marco's life to the late 1990s. Also indispensable for English-language readers are Critchley, *Marco Polo's Book*; Jackson, "Marco Polo and His 'Travels'"; and Akbari and Iannucci, eds., *Marco Polo and the Encounter*. Older studies include Leonardo Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia: An Introduction to His "Description of the World" Called "Il Milione,"* trans. John A. Scott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); Jacques Heers, *Marco Polo* (Paris: Fayard, 1983); and the introductory essays to the major editions. While most information on the Polos comes from the *Divisament* itself, Giovanni Orlandini added documentary material covering the period 1280–1387 in his "Marco Polo e la sua Famiglia," *Archivio Veneto-Tridentino* 9 (1926): 1–68 and supplied some additional documents to Moule and Pelliot for their *Description*, vol. 1, 521–95. A more recent discussion is David Jacoby, "Marco Polo, His Close Relatives, and His Travel Account: Some New Insights," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 21 (2006): 193–218.

35. Heers, *Marco Polo*, 165–85. On Italian merchants in China, see Robert Sabatino Lopez, "European Merchants in the Medieval Indies: The Evidence of Commercial Documents," *Journal of Economic History* 3 (1943): 164–84; Robert Sabatino Lopez, "China Silk in Europe in the Yuan Period," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 72 (1952): 72–76; and Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, 102–21.

36. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 16 and 17 (Ronchi, 317–19; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 85–87).

37. Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, 82.

38. Frances Wood, *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996).

39. For detailed rebuttal of Wood's book, see Igor de Rachewiltz, "Marco Polo Went to China," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 27 (1997): 34–92. The positive case has also been made by Critchley, *Marco Polo's Book*, xi–xiv; Larner, *Marco Polo*, 58–63; Jackson, "Marco Polo"; Stephen G. Haw, *Marco Polo's China: A Venetian in the Realm of Khubilai Khân* (London: Routledge, 2006); and Jacoby, "Marco Polo," among others.

40. John W. Haeger, "Marco Polo in China? Problems with Internal Evidence," *Bulletin of Song and Yuan Studies* 14 (1978): 22–30.

41. John Larner, "Plucking Hairs from the Great Cham's Beard: Marco Polo, Jan de Langhe, and Sir John Mandeville," in *Marco Polo and the Encounter*, ed. Akbari and Iannucci, 133–55, quote at 134–35. Dutschke comments that of 135 manuscripts of the *Divisament* only one contains a map (in contrast with modern editions and translations, which almost invariably do), but this does not show the Polos' route but is instead a standard T-O type ("Francesco Pipino," 27).

42. There has been some dispute over precisely which Venetian Genoese battle is referred to, as Larner summarizes (*Marco Polo*, 43–44), or whether Marco's military involvement is a fiction (Jacoby, "Marco Polo," 200–201).

43. The collaboration is discussed by many including *Il Milione*, ed. Benedetto, xiii–xxvii; Cesare Segre, "Introduzione," in *Milione*, ed. Ronchi, xi–xv (and see also the introductory essays to all the major editions); Critchley, *Marco Polo's Book*, 2–9; Larner, *Marco Polo*, ch. 3; and Simon Gaunt, "Translating the Diversity of the Middle Ages: Marco Polo and John Mandeville as 'French Writers,'" *Australian Journal of French Studies* 46 (2009): 235–48. Rusticello's other work included *Méliadus*, a collection of abridged prose stories concerning marginal Arthurian figures, the wording of which in places echoes sections of the *Divisament*.

44. Critchley, *Marco Polo's Book*, 137–48, illustrates Pipino's attempts to give the book a more pious voice. Dutschke ("43% of surviving manuscripts"; "Francesco Pipino" 13) offers detailed examination of this version, the author, and the manuscripts.

45. Larner, *Marco Polo*, 44. According to Dutschke, however, of the surviving manuscripts many of the vernacular versions are unique, while 77 are in Latin, 22 in French, 15 in Venetian, and 14 in Tuscan (see "Francesco Pipino," 22–23).

46. Paris, Bib. Nat. fr. 2810; London, BL Royal 19.D.I; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 264; Paris, Bib. De l'Arsenal, MS fr. 5219 (the last was made in the sixteenth century). On the illuminated copies, see Debra Higgs Strickland, "Artists, Audience, and Ambivalence in Marco

Polo's *Divisament dou monde*," *Viator* 36 (2005): 493–529 esp. 493–97 and her "Text, Image, and Contradiction in the *Devisement dou monde*," in *Marco Polo and the Encounter*, ed. Akbari and Iannucci, 23–59 esp. 24–26. See also Dutschke, "Francesco Pipino," 35–40; Larner, *Marco Polo*, 110–11; and R. Wittkower, "Marco Polo and the Pictorial Tradition of the Marvels of the East," in *Oriente Poliano*, ed. É. Balazs et al. (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1957), 155–72.

47. Strickland, "Text, Image, and Contradiction" ("functional Saracens" quote at 33).

48. Dutschke, "Francesco Pipino," 29–42; Larner, *Marco Polo*, 110–14.

49. For the many theories about the name, including that it referred to Marco's wealth or to his putative proper name, Emilio, see Boleslaw Szczesniak, "Marco Polo's Surname 'Milione' According to Newly Discovered Documents," *T'oung Pao* 48 (1960): 447–52; also Larner, *Marco Polo*, 44, 69–70, 77, 131, 199n62.

50. Dutschke, "Francesco Pipino," 43–62, in greater detail in her appendix, 1162–1293; Larner, *Marco Polo*, 44–45, 133–50. Compare Reichert, *Begegnungen mit China*, 276, 232–33; Critchley, *Marco Polo's Book*, 130–57. Dutschke also examines the extensive marginal comments in Latin, Italian, and French manuscripts to find that many less celebrated readers, with some interesting exceptions, regarded the book as true and useful ("Francesco Pipino," 71–99).

51. Larner, *Marco Polo*, 171–76.

52. Suzanne M. Yeager, "The World Translated: Marco Polo's *Le Devisement dou monde*, *The Book of Sir John Mandeville*, and Their Medieval Audiences," in *Marco Polo and the Encounter*, ed. Akbari and Iannucci, 156–81 esp. 158–60.

53. Quoted in Christine Gadrat, "Marco Polo and the Dominicans" (paper delivered at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 12 July 2010). I am indebted to Dr. Gadrat for sending me a copy of this paper before publication. Filippino's use of the *Divisament* is also mentioned in Dutschke, "Francesco Pipino," 50–51, and the anecdotes quoted in her appendix, 1227–59.

54. Larner, *Marco Polo*, 50.

55. Noted in *Il Milione*, ed. Benedetto, ccxvi, note 2; Dutschke, "Francisco Pipino," 52; Larner, *Marco Polo*, 137.

56. An edition of the Latin text with a modern French translation is Riccold de Monte Croce, *Pèrègrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche Orient: Text latin et traduction. Lettres sur la chute de Saint-Jean d'Acre*, ed. and trans. René Kappler (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997). Older editions by Laurent and de Backer are obsolete. A modern English translation by Rita George Tvrtkovic has recently been published but too late to be incorporated into this book. Biographical details and accounts of his work are found in Kappler's introduction, 9–18, and Kurt Villads Jensen, "Ricold of Monte Croce (d. 1320)," in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration*, ed. Friedman and Figg, 520–21.

57. Kappler, introduction to Riccold, *Pèrègrination*, 22–29, lists and describes these.

58. The letters are edited in Wyngaert, vol. 1, 331–77. Monte Corvino's and Andrew of Perugia's letters are translated in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, ed. and trans. Henry Yule, 2nd ed. rev. Henri Cordier, Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., nos. 33–41, 4 vols. (London, 1914; reissued New Delhi, 1998), vol. 3, 45–58; Monte Corvino's and Peregrine of Castello's letters are also translated in *Mission to Asia*, ed. Dawson, 224–37. On medieval missionary work in China, see A. C. Moule, *Christians in China Before the Year 1550* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), 166–215; Richard, *Papauté et les missions d'Orient*, 144–56; Charbonnier, *Christians in China*, 98–107; Ryan, "Conversion vs. Baptism?" 152–61.

59. Jordan's letters, which like those of the other missionaries exist in their earliest form only in fourteenth-century Franciscan copies, are translated in Yule, vol. 3, 75–80 but more recently edited with valuable discussion by Christine Gadrat in *Une Image de l'Orient au XIV^e siècle: Les Mirabilia Descripta de Jordan Catala de Sévérac, édition, traduction et commentaire*, Mémoires et documents de l'École des Chartes no. 78 (Paris: École des Chartes, 2005), 309–13. For biography, see pp. 39–69 and A. C. Moule, "Brother Jordan of Sévérac," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1928): 349–76.

60. Pascal's letter is in Wyngaert, *Sinica*, vol. 1, 497–506 (Yule, vol. 3, 81–88).

61. Wyngaert, *Sinica*, vol. 1, 349–45 (Yule, vol. 3, 58–70).

62. *Cathay*, ed. Yule, vol. 3, 5–6.

63. Christine Gadrat, "Des nouvelles d'Orient: Les lettres des missionnaires et leur diffusion en Occident (XIII^e–XIV^e siècles)," in *Passages: Déplacement des hommes, circulation des textes et*

identités dans l'Occident médiéval, ed. Joëlle Ducos and Patrick Henriët, Actes du colloque de Bordeaux, 2–3 February 2007, forthcoming. My gratitude to Dr. Gadrat for sending me a copy of her essay prior to publication.

64. London, BL Add. MS 19513, fols. 3r–12r. For an edition with French translation, see *Une Image de l'Orient*, ed. and trans. Gadrat, 243–95. This supplants Jordanus of Sévérac, *Mirabilia descripta*, ed. Coquebert de Montbret, in *Recueil de voyages et de memoires de la Société de Géographie* 4 (1839): 37–64.

65. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 99 (Gadrat, 257; Yule, 37).

66. Christine Gadrat, “*De statu, conditione ac regimine magni canis*: L’original latin du ‘Livres de l’estat du grant caan’ et la question de l’auteur,” *Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes* 165 (2007): 355–71, with edition of the Latin text at 365–71. For an edition of the 1351 French text, see E. Jacquet, ed., “Le livre du Grant Caan, extrait d’un manuscrit de la Bibliothèque du Roi,” *Nouveau journal asiatique* 6 (1830): 57–72. Yule translates this into English, “The Book of the Estate of the Great Caan,” in *Cathay*, vol. 3, 89–103.

67. Gadrat, “*De statu, conditione ac regimine magni canis*,” 357–65. Her important new work on this text entirely replaces Yule’s account, *Cathay*, vol. 3, 36–37.

68. John of Marignolli, *Relatio*, in Wyngaert, vol. 1, 524–60 (Yule, vol. 3, 209–69). Biographical and textual details by Wyngaert, vol. 1, 515–23 (Yule, vol. 3, 177–208). An English translation with commentary and introductory materials is also available in C. F. Thomas, “A Missionary and Pilgrimage Chronicle of the Mid-Fourteenth Century” (MLitt thesis, University of Auckland, 1995). A recent French translation is Christine Gadrat, *Jean de Marignolli: Au jardin d’Eden* (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2009), which also provides background material. See also Marion A. Habig, “Marignolli and the Decline of Medieval Missions in China,” *Franciscan Studies* 26 (1945): 21–36.

69. *Cathay*, ed. Yule, vol. 3, 177.

70. Odoric of Pordenone, *Relatio*, in Wyngaert, vol. 1, 413–95 (trans. Yule, vol. 2, 97–277). An edition of the mid-fourteenth-century Italian version is Odorico da Pordenone, *Libro delle nuove e strane e meravigliose cose*, ed. A. Andreose (Padua: Centro studi antoniani, 2000). Jean de Vignay’s early fourteenth-century French translation is edited in Jean de Vignay, *Les Merveilles de la Terre d’Outremer: Traduction du XIV^e siècle du récit de voyage d’Odoric de Pordenone*, ed. D. A. Trotter (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990). See also D. A. Trotter, “‘En ensivant la pure verité de la letre’: Jean de Vignay’s translation of Odoric of Pordenone,” in *Littera et Sensus: Essays on Form and Meaning in Medieval French Literature Presented to John Fox*, ed. D. A. Trotter (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1989), 31–47. Trotter laments the lack of reliable information about the *Relatio*’s production and of a modern critical edition of the Latin text. For biography and background information, see A. C. Moule, “A Life of Odoric of Pordenone,” *T’oung Pao*, 2nd ser., 20 (1920–21): 275–90 (which includes translations of contemporary accounts of his life, death, and miracles) and de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, 179–86. The author and his remarkable book have been comparatively neglected in English-language scholarship, which is unfortunate given the wide interest in Mandeville, but should begin to be rectified by the work of Marianne O’Doherty among others.

71. Odoric, *Relatio*, I.1 (Wyngaert, 413; Yule, vol. 2, 97).

72. Marianne O’Doherty, “The *Viaggio in Inghilterra* of a *Viaggio in Oriente*: Odorico da Pordenone’s *Itinerarium* from Italy to England,” *Italian Studies* 64 (2009): 198–220 at 199n11.

73. *Ibid.*, passim.

74. The standard edition of the French and Latin versions is Hetoum of Armenia, *La flor des estoires de la terre d’Orient, ou Flos historiarum terre orientis*, ed. C. Kohler et al., in *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents arméniens* (Paris, 1906), vol. 2. Kohler’s edition of the French text is used throughout this book. A recent edition of John le Long’s version with parallel Latin text is *Die Geschichte der Mongolen des Hethum von Korykos (1307) in der Rückübersetzung durch Jean de Long*, *Traitez des estas et des conditions de quatorze royaumes de Aise (1351): Kritische Edition*, ed. Sven Dörper, Europäische Hochschulschriften Reihe III, Französische Sprache und Literatur (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998). No modern English translation of the original texts is yet available, but Glenn Burger’s edition of a sixteenth-century English translation helps fill that gap: Hetoum, *A Lytell Cronycle: Richard Pynson’s Translation (c. 1520) of “La fleur des histoires de la terre d’Orient” (c. 1307)*, ed. Glenn Burger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

75. Hetoum, *Die Geschichte der Mongolen*, ed. Dörper, 36–38. Dörper counts a few more copies than Burger (x–xi) and Kohler (vol. 2, lxxviii–cxxx). The physical status of the

manuscripts and their contents also indicates a diverse readership. Cambridge, UL MS Dd.1.17, for example, a large volume mostly in Latin, also containing Marco Polo, Mandeville, and some items on Islam, is thought to have belonged to Glastonbury Abbey at the end of the fourteenth century, suggesting an educated readership looking to collect information on eastern peoples and lands. Some copies were made as high-status secular volumes with extensive illumination, such as London, BL Add. MS 17971 and John, Duke de Berry's volume, now Paris, Bib. Nat. fr. 2810.

76. Biography summarized in Denis Sinor's entry, "Hetoum [Hetum/Hayton]," in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration*, ed. Friedman and Figg, 251–52; provided in greater detail in Kohler's edition, introduction to *Recueil des historiens*, vol. 2, xxv–l.

77. Hetoum, *Lytell Cronycle*, ed. Burger, x.

78. The original was written in Armenian by Kirakos Gandsaketsi, a member of King Hetoum's court, and survives in one manuscript. An abridged English translation is "The Journey of Haithon, King of Little Armenia, to Mongolia and Back, A.D. 1254–55," in *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, trans. Emil Bretschneider, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1937), vol. 1, 164–72.

79. Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura* (abridged), ed. Allan Evans (Cambridge MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1936; reprint, 1970), partially translated in Yule, *Cathay*, vol. 3, 270–308.

80. Pegolotti, *Pratica*, ed. Evans, 21–22 (Yule, vol. 3, 151–52).

81. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, ed. Merisalo, 153–77; English translation in *Travelers in Disguise: Narratives of Eastern Travel by Poggio Bracciolini and Ludovico de Varthema*, trans. John Winter Jones, revised with an introduction by Lincoln Davis Hammond (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 3–45. Summary information is supplied by Lach, *Asia in the Making*, vol. 1, 59–63; Francis M. Rogers, *The Quest for Eastern Christians: Travels and Rumor in the Age of Discovery* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 44–49; and Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, 85–124.

82. Hammond, introduction to *Travelers in Disguise*, ix–xv, 6; compare Merisalo, introduction to *De varietate fortunae*, 19.

83. Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, 85–124.

84. Merisalo, introduction to *De varietate fortunae*, 25–72; also *Le voyage aux Indes de Nicolò de Conti (1414–1439)*, trans. Diane Ménard, ed. Geneviève Bouchon and Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary (Paris: Chandeigne, 2004), 41.

85. Kennon Breazeale provides a list of major editions and translations to 2004: "Editorial Introduction to Nicolò de' Conti's Account," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 2 (2004): 100–109; an older bibliographic study is Henri Cordier, "Bibliographie. Deux voyageurs dans l'Extrême-orient au XVe et au XVIe siècles. Essai bibliographique. Nicolò de' Conti—Lodovico de Varthema," *T'oung Pao*, 1st ser., 10 (1899): 380–404.

86. Pero Tafur, *Andanças e viajes de un hidalgo español*, ed. Marcos Jiménez de la Espada (Madrid: Miraguano Ediciones, 1995); translation in Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures, 1435–1439*, ed. and trans. Malcolm Letts (London: Routledge, 1926), see 84–85. Poggio also mentions the deaths of Niccolò's wife and children: *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 164; Jones and Hammond, 24).

87. Hammond, introduction to *Travelers in Disguise*, xiii–xv.

88. Clavijo, *Relación*, ed. Estrada; *Embassy to Tamerlane*, trans. le Strange.

89. Johann Schiltberger, *Hans Schiltbergers Reisebuch*, ed. Valentin Langmantel, Bibliothek des Literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 172 (Tübingen, 1885), translated as *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger, a Native of Bavaria, in Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396–1427*, trans. J. Buchan Telfer, Hakluyt Society, 1st ser., no. 59 (London, 1879). For background, see Jean Richard, "Schiltberger, Johann (c. 1381–1430)," in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration*, ed. Friedman and Figg, 538–39.

90. Hieronimo di Santo Stefano, "The Journey of Hieronimo di Santo Stefano, a Genovese," in *India in the Fifteenth Century, Being a Collection of Narratives of Voyages to India*, trans. R. H. Major, Hakluyt Society, 1st ser., no. 20 (London, 1857). The traveler appears to have visited Ceylon, the east coast of India, Pegu in Burma, Sumatra, and the Maldives. For short discussion, see Lach, *Asia in the Making*, vol. 1, 64–65.

91. Ludovico de Varthema, *Itinerario di Ludovico de Varthema*, ed. P. Guidici, 2nd ed. (Milan: Alpes, 1929); translation in *Travelers in Disguise* by Jones and Hammond. For biography and details on the book, see Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, 125–63.

92. Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, 127–28.

93. *Ibid.*, 135.

94. M. C. Seymour, *Sir John Mandeville*, *Authors of the Middle Ages I* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993) provides a concise overview. Deluz's edition of the Insular version is used throughout the present book. Recent translations include *The Book of John Mandeville with Related Texts*, ed. and trans. Iain Macleod Higgins (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011), which translates the original French, and *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, translated with introduction and notes by Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), based on Middle English versions.

95. Older contributions to the authorship debate include G. F. Warner, introduction to *The Buke of John Maundeuill*, ed. G. F. Warner (Westminster: Roxburghe Club, 1889), xxx–xl (arguing for Jean de Bourgogne); Paul Hamelius, introduction to *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. Paul Hamelius, 2 vols., EETS o.s. 153, 154 (Oxford, 1919, 1923) (arguing for Jean d'Outremeuse); Malcolm Letts, *Sir John Mandeville: The Man and His Book* (London: Batchworth Press, 1949), 13–22 (arguing for a real Englishman called Sir John Mandeville); and J. W. Bennett, *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* (New York: PMLA, 1954), 89–216 (also arguing for the authenticity of the author's name and nationality).

96. *Mandeville's Travels: Texts and Translations*, ed. and trans. Malcolm Letts, 2 vols., Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., no. 101 (London, 1953), vol. 1, xxxii–xxxiv, 1 (comparative table).

97. Quoted in Louis de Backer, ed., *L'Extrême Orient au Moyen-Age* (Paris: Leroux, 1877), 8–9n1: “vir eruditus, pius at studio delectatus historico, tantique abdominis ut vix progredi, nec aliter dormire quam sedendo potuerit” (my translation).

98. Christiane Deluz, *Le Livre de Jehan de Mandeville: Une “géographie” au XIV^e siècle*, Textes, études, congrès 8 (Louvain-la-Neuve: Publications de l'institut d'études médiévales, 1988), esp. 363–64 and her introduction to Mandeville, *Livre*, 7–36; Michael Bennett, “Mandeville's Travels and the Anglo-French Moment,” *Medium Aevum* 75 (2006): 272–92. Bennett's suggestions are taken further in W. M. Ormrod, “John Mandeville, Edward III, and the King of Inde,” *Chaucer Review* 46 (2012): 314–339.

99. Higgins, *Writing East*, 13. See also Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 239–305, and Rosemary Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences: A Study on the Reception of the Book of Sir John Mandeville (1371–1550)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

100. Higgins, *Writing East*, 9–20, quotes at 11 and 13. While Higgins's recommendation to read each of the main variants of the *Book* alongside one another cannot be faulted, that approach has not been practical for the present book given the number of major sources employed.

101. Scott D. Westrem, preface to *Broader Horizons: A Study of Johannes Witte de Hese's “Itinerarius” and Medieval Travel Narratives* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 2001), xi. Another fictional late medieval travelogue is *El Libro del conocimiento de todos los reinos* (*The Book of Knowledge of All Kingdoms*), ed. and trans. Nancy F. Marino (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999).

102. Westrem, *Broader Horizons*, 11.

103. *Ibid.*, 22.

104. *Ibid.*, 61.

105. The standard edition remains “Der Brief des Priesters Johannes an den byzantischen Kaiser Emanuel,” ed. Friedrich Zarncke, in *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, 7 (Leipzig, 1879), reprinted in *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes*, ed. Charles F. Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996). *La Lettre du Prêtre Jean: Édition des versions en ancien français et en ancien Occitan*, ed. Martin Gosman (Groningen: Bouma, 1982) prints versions of the text in Old French and Occitan. There is no complete English translation of Zarncke's edition incorporating all the interpolations. Partial translations include Sir E. Denison Ross, “Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia,” in *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Percival Newton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1926), translation at 174–78; Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: The Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), which provides a modern English translation of a French printed version of c. 1500 (67–79); and most recently Michael Uebel in *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 155–60, which follows Zarncke's text and includes some but not all of the interpolated material. Uebel also lists some lesser English

translations, two German, one Italian, and one Dutch (221n1). Edward Ullendorff and C. F. Beckingham, *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) include English translations of Hebrew versions. A full description of the contents of Zarncke's edition, including all the interpolations though stopping short of translation proper, is in Malcolm Letts, "Prester John: Sources and Illustrations," *Notes and Queries* 188 (1945): 178–80, 204–7, 246–48, 266–68, and 189 (1945): 4–7.

106. Letts, "Prester John."

107. Bernard Hamilton, "Prester John and the Three Kings of Cologne," in *Prester John*, ed. Beckingham and Hamilton, 171–85, quotes at 180, 183, 186. Slessarev's *Prester John*, 6–54, discusses origins and sources of the *Letter*. Michael D. Uebel's entry "Prester John," in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration*, ed. Friedman and Figg, 504–5, offers a concise overview.

108. David Morgan, "Prester John and the Mongols," in *Prester John*, ed. Beckingham and Hamilton; also the essays by Paul Pelliot and Jean Richard in the same volume.

109. Bernard Hamilton, "Continental Drift: Prester John's Progress Through the Indies," and C. F. Beckingham, "The Quest for Prester John," both in *Prester John*, ed. Beckingham and Hamilton, survey the shifting locations of Prester John and explain that the move from East Asia to "Ethiopia" was not illogical, given the common medieval geographical understanding of eastern Africa as one of the "Indies," usually "the third India" or "Middle India."

110. Uebel, "Prester John," 505.

111. *Ibid.*, 504–5.

112. *Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86*, ed. Judith Tschann and M. B. Parkes, EETS, s.s. 16 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), xi.

113. Tschann and Parkes, introduction to *Facsimile*, lvii–lviii; see also B. D. H. Miller, "The Early History of Bodleian MS Digby 86," *Annuaire medievale* 4 (1963): 26–56; J. Frankis, "The Social Context of Vernacular Texts," in *Thirteenth-Century England 1*, ed. P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1986), 175–84; Marilyn Corrie, "A Study of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86: Literature in Late Thirteenth-Century England" (DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1995), 9–29.

114. For example in Britain, London, BL Harleian MSS 3099 and 3185; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 158; London, BL MSS Royal 12.C.VI and 13.A.XIV; Cambridge, CCC, MSS 66A and 275.

115. *Letter of Prester John*, sections 45–46, 51–52 (Zarncke, 915, 916; Uebel, 157).

116. *Letter of Prester John*, section 9 (Zarncke, 910; Uebel, 155).

117. *Letter of Prester John*, section 14 (Zarncke, 910–11; Uebel, 156).

118. *Letter of Prester John*, sections 21, 24–25 (Zarncke, 912; Uebel, 156).

119. *Letter of Prester John*, sections 56–71 (Zarncke, 917–20; Uebel, 18–59).

120. For example, "Prester John's place—the place of the utopic—at the origins and boundaries of the thinkable affords us the opportunity to construct a model of how otherness became the crucial myth by which Latin Europe organized and conceived of itself" (Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation*, 53).

121. *Letter of Prester John*, sections 10–11 (Zarncke, 910; Uebel, 155).

122. Slessarev, translation in *Prester John*, 67.

123. Slessarev, translation in *Prester John*, 67, 79.

124. The tradition of incorporating Prester John into Western genealogies goes back to one of the earliest literary treatments of the figure in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* of the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Parzival's half brother Feirefiz, born the pagan son of Parzival's father, Gahmuret, and first wife, a Moor called Belacane, converts to Christianity in order to marry the Grail bearer Repanse de Schoye. Feirefiz, a hybrid whose own skin is said to be black and white in patches like a magpie, returns to the East with his bride and together they have a son, Prester John, after whom all subsequent heirs will be named and who will preach Christianity through the Indies. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 402–8 (I am grateful to Dr. Kathryn Smits for this reference).

CHAPTER 3

This chapter substantially revises ideas previously presented in my essay "Travel Writing and the Far East, c. 1245–c. 1500," in *Medieval Travel Writing: Journeys to the Holy Land, India*

and the Far East, ed. Kim M. Phillips et al. (Marlborough: Adam Matthews Digital, 2007), <http://www.medievaltravel.amdigital.co.uk/Index.aspx>.

1. "This is a genre composed of other genres. ... It is a genre that confronts, at their extreme limit, representational tasks proper to a number of literary kinds. ... Some of these demands are familiar to the 'participant-observers' of ethnography, others to writers and critics of fictional realism or historiography" (Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, 6). "Travel writing feeds from and back into other forms of literature. To try to identify boundaries between various forms would be impossible and I would be deeply suspicious of any attempt at the task" (Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850–1900* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994], 8). Paul Zumthor also notes the problem of trying to identify travel narratives as constituting genre in "The Medieval Travel Narrative," trans. Catherine Peebles, *New Literary History* 25 (1994): 809–24 at 811, though his essay should be used with care. A recent collection with valuable contributions is Palmira Brummett, ed., *The "Book" of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

2. Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *New Literary History* 2 (1970): 7–37, esp. 12.

3. Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Travel Writing as a Genre: Facts, Fictions and the Invention of a Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe," *Journeys* 1 (2000): 5–33, quote at 7, italics added.

4. Jan Borm, "Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology," in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 14, 17, original italics removed. By "dominant" Borm refers to an idea of Hans Robert Jauss that enables one to gather together works of different genres because they share dominant features.

5. Tim Youngs, "Introduction," *Studies in Travel Writing* 1 (1997): 1–8, quote at 5.

6. Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, 5, 15.

7. Pilgrimage literature, naturally, forms a key subset of medieval "travel literature" but is not the central subject of this book.

8. Chorography refers to descriptions of particular regions rather than either the whole earth ("geography") or a single place ("topography"). See Claudius Ptolemy, *The Geography*, trans. and ed. Edward Luther Stevenson with an introduction by Joseph Fischer (New York: New York Public Library, 1932; reprint, New York: Dover, 1991), bk. 1.1, 25: Romer, introduction to *Mela's Description of the World*, trans. Romer, 4.

9. Borm, "Defining Travel," 15–18.

10. Westrem, *Broader Horizons*, 14.

11. For the first of these, see Dutschke, "Francesco Pipino," 292; I have seen the others.

12. Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, 6.

13. Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (1995; New York: Routledge, 2002), xi.

14. Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, 9.

15. William Dalrymple, *In Xanadu: A Quest* (London: Harper Collins, 1990), 66–67.

16. Syed Manzurul Islam, *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 121.

17. Wood, *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* 37–38.

18. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder," *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1–26, quote at 20.

19. "They have wide mouths and turned-up noses. Their eyes and lips are so protuberant that they are a horrible sight. Anyone meeting them in another country would mistake them for devils." Blanton sees this as "a good example of the tendency of all travellers until very recently to carry with them the unexamined values and norms of their own culture and to judge foreign cultures in light of those habits of belief, thus establishing a kind of control over them" (Blanton, *Travel Writing*, 7–8).

20. Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, 4, 7.

21. Islam, *Ethics of Travel*, esp. 118–37.

22. My views are almost identical to those of Longxi Zhang, "Marco Polo, Chinese Cultural Identity, and an Alternative Model of East-West Encounter," in *Marco Polo and the Encounter*, ed. Akbari and Iannucci, 280–96 esp. 284.

23. Andrea Rossi-Reder, "Wonders of the Beast: India in Classical and Medieval

Literature,” in *Marvls, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, ed. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), 66.

24. Larner, *Marco Polo*, 68–85.

25. *Ibid.*, 90–91.

26. Rubruck's narrative fits Blanton's explanation for the persistent popularity of travel literature: “The travel narrative is a compelling and seductive form of story-telling. Its reader is swept along on the surface of the text by the pure forward motion of the journey while being initiated into strange and often dangerous new territory. The traveller/narrator's well-being and eventual safe homecoming become the primary tensions of the tale, the traveler's encounter with the other its chief attraction” (*Travel Writing*, 2).

27. Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, 114–15.

28. “It [Rubruck's *Relatio*] has few superiors in the whole library of travel” (*Book of Ser Marco Polo*, ed. Yule, vol. 1, 105); William Rockhill speaks of William's claim “to the highest recognition” (*The Journey of Friar William of Rubruck*, Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., no. 4 [London, 1900], ix); Leonardo Olschki considers the book “one of the most original and interesting masterpieces in the whole of medieval Latin literature” (*Marco Polo's Asia*, 69); Christopher Dawson calls it “one of the most living and moving narratives in the whole literature of travel” (*Mission to Asia*, xxii–xxiii); John Larner claims that it “can without exaggeration be described as one of the great works of travel literature” (*Marco Polo*, 24–25).

29. Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*, 120.

30. “[S]lowly and sidelong, Ibn Battutah reveals himself: snatches of homesickness, intolerance, exasperation, bemusement, bafflement, disgust, lust; of a traveller who got the runs and got ripped off. ... In contrast, the fascinating yet somehow bloodless adventures of Marco Polo ... seem to belong to the past. The Venetian's death, shortly before Ibn Battutah started travelling, was nicely timed” (Tim Mackintosh-Smith, introduction to *The Travels of Ibn Battutah* [London: Picador, 2003], viii). Yet Ibn Battuta's book gained little readership among his Arab contemporaries (see *ibid.*, xii). For a full English translation, see *The Travels of Ibn Battūta, A.D. 1325–1354*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb and C. F. Beckingham with index by A. D. H. Bivar, 5 vols., Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., nos. 110, 117, 141, 178, 190 (London, 1958–2000). Several scholars since the late nineteenth century have expressed doubts about the authenticity of the Chinese sections of his book, but Ross E. Dunn asserts that “no one has made a completely convincing case that Ibn Battuta did not go to East Asia, at least as far as the ports of South China.” See *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, a Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 252–53, quote at 253.

31. Jackson, introduction to in *Mission of Friar William*, 52; Moule and Pelliot, *Description of the World*, vol. 1, 509–16.

32. Hammond, introduction to *Travelers in Disguise*, xii.

33. *Ibid.*, xxviii.

34. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, in *Travelers in Disguise*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 53.

35. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 55.

36. For a philosophical introduction to “Otherness” or alterity, see Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). For the psychoanalytic approach, see Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2002), 1–7, although O/otherness is not treated in detail there and rather recurs as a theme throughout his writing (see Taylor, *Altarity*, 83–113). Jeffrey Jerome Cohen refines concepts of Other by recourse to the Lacanian notion of *extimité* in *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), esp. xii, xv, 180; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Denis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 71. The concept of hybridity has also enhanced many recent studies of postcolonial contexts but is not engaged here as it depends on cultural interchange brought about by colonization. See, for example, Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 2005). Hybridity has, however, been interestingly deployed by medievalists in relation to particular medieval texts and contexts; see, for example, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Gaunt, “Translating the Diversity.”

37. Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse

of Colonialism,” in *Location of Culture*, 66–84, quote at 70.

38. James Duncan and Derek Gregory, introduction to *Writes of Passage*, 1–13, quote at 2–3. Six of the nine essays in this collection engage with Said’s *Orientalism*.

39. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

40. Peter Rietbergen, *Europe: A Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1998), xxi.

41. Campbell, *Witness and the Other World*; Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation*; Michèle Guéret-Laferté, *Sur les routes de l’Empire Mongol: Ordre et rhétorique des relations de voyage aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles* (Paris: Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Âge 28, 1994). Akbari also argues that for medieval Christians, “defining Islam and the Orient was, for the most part, simply a way to indirectly define the self” (Akbari, *Idols*, 280), but as noted in Chapter 1 she is clear that the same process does not apply to contemporaries’ view of the more distant Orient. Robert Bartlett remarks, in more general terms, “The term ‘the Other’ (capitalized) has indeed become rather a tired one, but it is hard to find any more appropriate label for this tendency to project the fantastic, the scarcely imaginable and the extraordinary into distant locales. John de Marignolli’s India was his Other, but when he got there he found he was theirs.” See *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages: Wiles Lectures Given at the Queen’s University of Belfast, 2006* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 106.

42. Rubruck, *Itinerarium* I.14 (Wyngaert, 171; Jackson, 71).

43. Albrecht Classen, “Introduction: The Self, the Other, and Everything in Between: Xenological Phenomenology of the Middle Ages,” in *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Routledge, 2002), xi–lxxiii, quote at xv; Paul Freedman, “The Medieval Other: The Middle Ages as Other,” in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles*, ed. Jones and Sprunger, 1–24; Münkler, *Erfahrung des Fremden*, ch. 2.

44. W. R. Jones, “The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13 (1971): 376–407 (reprinted in *Medieval Ethnographies*, ed. Rubiés); on Mongols as “barbarous,” see 398–400 (369–71 in reprint). Felicitas Schmieder also examines the theme in relation to the Mongols, for example, in “Menschenfresser und andere Stereotypen gewalttätiger Fremder—Normannen, Ungarn und Mongolen (9.–13. Jahrhundert),” in *Gewalt im Mittelalter. Realitäten—Imaginationen*, ed. Manuel Braun and Cornelia Herberichs (Munich: Wilhem Fink, 2005), 159–79, and “Nomaden in Europa und Europäer unter Nomaden. Lateinisch-mittelalterliche Verarbeitungen einer fremdartigen Lebensform,” in *Der imaginierte Nomade. Formel und Realitätsbezug bei antiken, mittelalterlichen und arabischen Autoren*, ed. Alexander Weiß (Wiesbaden: David Brown, 2007), 137–54. On the European bias against unsettled peoples, see also Anthony Pagden, “Europe: Conceptualizing a Continent,” in *The Idea of Europe from Antiquity to the European Union*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33–54 at 39–40.

45. Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), x, 16–36.

46. Mela, for example, differentiated between the three continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa in his *Chorography* of c. 43–44 CE: *Mela’s Description of the World*, trans. Romer, bk. 19–23.

47. Hay, *Europe*, 58.

48. Cohen, introduction to *Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Cohen, 8. Cf. Classen, introduction to *Meeting the Foreign*, lvii, note 57.

49. Jacques le Goff, *The Birth of Europe*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).

50. Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 291.

51. *Ibid.*, 250–55.

52. William Chester Jordan, “‘Europe’ in the Middle Ages,” in *Idea of Europe*, ed. Pagden, 72–90, quote at 74–75. Also Gerard Delahunty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1995); Heikki Mikkeli, *Europe as an Idea and an Identity* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998); Rietbergen, *Europe*.

53. Timothy Reuter, “Medieval Ideas of Europe and Their Modern Historians,” *History Workshop Journal* 33 (1992): 176–80. His “Bibliographical Note,” 180, lists major historiographical contributions to this debate in various European languages.

54. Felicitas Schmieder, “Der mongolische Augenblick in der Weltgeschichte oder: Als Europa aus der Wiege wuchs,” *Das Mittelalter* 10 (2005): 63–73.

55. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 112–19; Giles, vol. 1, 341–47). Presumably Frederick refers to Antares, the “Watcher of the West,” one of the four royal stars

of Persian astronomy. Heather Blurton, noticing Matthew's response that posits the need to restore the *universalis ecclesiae* and *totius Christianissimi* against Frederick's *imperialis Europae* and even suggests the emperor was in league with the Tartars, wonders whether Matthew might have rewritten the letter for inclusion in his volume, so neatly does it support his anxiety about divisions within Christendom and the dangerous influence of Frederick: see *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 98–101.

56. "The Book of Lismore," probably compiled for Finghin MacCarthy Reagh, eighth Prince of Carbery, and his wife in the mid-fifteenth century or the prince's parents. See Brian O. Cuív, "Observations on the Book of Lismore," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 83C (1983): 269–92 and Caoimhín Breatnach, "Lismore, Book of," in *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Seán Duffy (New York: Routledge, 2005), 279–80.

57. As noted in the introduction, this theme will not be much developed here but deserves subsequent study.

58. John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of "Bartholomaeus Anglicus, De proprietatibus rerum."* A Critical Text, ed. M. C. Seymour et al., 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–78), vol. 2, 752–53. See Akbari, *Idols*, 41–46.

59. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 160 (Gadrat, 265; Yule, 55).

60. Carpini, *Historia*, VIII.3 (Menestò, 295; Dawson, 44).

61. Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, vol. 1, 244–55.

62. Pagden, "Europe: Conceptualizing a Continent," 50, emphasis added.

63. This will be discussed in Chapter 8.

64. Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, 7.

65. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 82–95 (Ronchi, 414–37; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 204–34).

66. Peter Harrison, "Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early-Modern England," *Isis* 92 (2001): 265–90 at 266–70. Also Heiko Oberman, "The Shape of Late Medieval Thought," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trinkaus and Heiko Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974): 3–25; William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 59–66. Discussions of early modern flowering of curiosity include Justin Stagl, *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel, 1550–1800* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995); Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Neil Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

67. Harrison, "Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy," 265–90.

68. Edward Peters, "The Desire to Know the Secrets of the World," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001): 593–610, quote at 598.

69. *Ibid.*, 604.

70. Richard Newhauser, "Towards a History of Human Curiosity: A Prolegomenon to Its Medieval Phase," in *Sin: Essays on the Moral Tradition in the Western Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Newhauser (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 559–75, esp. 561, 563, 567. See also his two further essays on *curiositas* collected in the same volume. Compare Christian K. Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage: The Literature of Discovery in Fourteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

71. "Wonder is an affective response to a wide range of phenomena: things rare and strange, small and large, beautiful and horrific. But at the same time wonder is a cognitive response—a suspended state between unknowing and knowing, a stage on the way to finding something out." Peter Platt, review of *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe*, by Mary Baine Campbell, *Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature* 3 (2001): 2.

72. Patrick Geary, "The Werewolf and Us," review of *Metamorphosis and Identity* by Caroline Walker Bynum, *New Republic*, 6 May 2002, 54–57, quote at 57.

73. Bynum, "Wonder."

74. For a sample of a wide literature, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, eds., *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality* (London: Methuen, 1987); Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life*

in *Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark, eds., *Medieval Conduct* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

75. Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (London: A. L. Humphreys, 1912), 43.

76. Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 24. Her first and second chapters examine the relationship between travel and knowledge.

CHAPTER 4

1. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.
2. Sidney M. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois, "The Anthropology of Food and Eating," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 99–119, quote at 109.
3. Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 4.
4. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1–2.
5. On this ancient theme and its medieval adaptations, see John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 27–28.
6. Saunders, *History of the Mongol Conquests*, 87–89; Morgan, *Mongols*, 136–45; Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 63–86, 113–15, 196–234.
7. See Chapter 2.
8. Carpini, *Historia*, II.7 (Menestò, 235; Dawson 8); Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, III.1 (Wyngaert, 177; Jackson, 79) on flocks and meat. Carpini's statement accords with modern historians' assessment of the Mongol economy including the centrality of the five principal animals of horses, sheep, camels, cattle, and goats: Thomas Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire and Mongolian Rule in North China," in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368*, ed. Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 326–29.
9. Carpini, *Historia*, I.4, 6 (Menestò, 230, 231; Dawson, 5, 6).
10. On this theme, see also Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden*, 225–27.
11. Carpini, *Historia*, IV.2 (Menestò, 246; Dawson, 15).
12. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 70 (Ronchi, 390; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 173); Clavijo, *Relation*, bk. 2 (Estrada, 141; le Strange, 191). Clavijo goes on to describe their methods of basic food preparation.
13. Carpini, *Historia*, IV.7 (Menestò, 248; Dawson, 16). The story of starvation-induced human-eating during the siege of the Kitayans is repeated in V.9 (Menestò, 256; Dawson, 21).
14. *Tartar Relation*, paras. 9, 13, 54 (Önnerfors, 7, 10, 33; Skelton, Marston, and Painter, 60–61, 64–65, 96–97).
15. Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, bk. 95 (Wailly, 174; Hague, 148).
16. Schiltberger, *Reisebuch*, ch. 37 (Langmantel, 61; Telfer, 48).
17. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, V.1 (Wyngaert, 180; Jackson, 84).
18. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 26 (Deluz, 408–9); Vincent of Beauvais, *Spec. hist.*, cap. 77.
19. London, BL MS Harley 3954, fol. 24r.
20. Carpini, *Historia*, IV.8 (Menestò, 248–49; Dawson, 16–17).
21. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, III. 1–2 (Wyngaert, 176–77; Jackson, 79).
22. Carpini, *Historia*, IX.16, 19, 37 (Menestò, 311, 312, 323; Dawson, 56, 57–58, 66, quote at 66).
23. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XI.3 (Wyngaert, 192; Jackson, 103), XX.2 (Wyngaert, 216; Jackson, 135).
24. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXII.1 (Wyngaert, 221; Jackson, 141). See also chs. XIII.4, XXIX.17.
25. Pegolotti, *Pratica*, ch. 2 (Evans, 22; Yule, vol. 3, 152).
26. Carpini, *Historia*, IV.6, IX.30, 32 (Menestò, 247, 318, 320; Dawson, 16, 62, 63); Rubruck adds vivid detail on drinking rituals and the process of making kumis, *Itinerarium*, II.9–10, IV.1–4 (Wyngaert, 175–76, 177–78; Jackson, 76–78, 81–82); Riccold, *Pérégrination*, 7ra (Kappler, 82).

27. Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, bk. 95 (Wailly, 174; Hague, 148).
28. Carpini, *Historia*, III.7, IV.8 (Menestò, 239–40, 248–49; Dawson, 11, 16–17); Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, III.2 (Wyngaert, 177; Jackson, 80).
29. Carpini, *Historia*, V.17 (Menestò, 263–64; Dawson, 25).
30. *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. and trans. Igor de Rachewiltz, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), vol. 1, 18–19. *The Secret History*, composed c. 1228 but subject to considerable later revision and interpolations by Yuan and Ming editors, is regarded as the most important Mongolian text of its (or indeed any) era. Although its reliability as an historical record is a matter for dispute, de Rachewiltz views it as an “epic chronicle”: by no means an unproblematic document of events but nonetheless an unparalleled account of early thirteenth-century Mongol society. See his introduction to *Secret History*, xxv–cxiii.
31. Carpini, *Historia*, III.3, 5, 12 (Menestò, 236–37, 238, 241–42; Dawson, 9, 10, 12–13). Also Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, II.8 (Wyngaert, 175; Jackson, 75–76).
32. I owe this observation to John Bevan-Smith.
33. Allsen, “Rise of the Mongolian Empire,” 326–27.
34. Carpini, *Historia*, VIII.2–3 (Menestò, 293–95; Dawson, 43–44).
35. Jones, “Image of the Barbarian,” 398–99.
36. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Maureen Gallery Kovacs (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), tablet 2.
37. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E. V. Rieu, rev. D. H. C. Rieu and Peter V. Jones (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), bk. 9.
38. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 31 (Deluz, 448); Witte, *Itinerarius* (Westrem, 129; trans., 210).
39. Carpini, *Historia*, IV.8 (Menestò, 248–49; Dawson, 16–17), though he adds that the more wealthy have small cloths for wiping their hands.
40. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXIX.22 (Wyngaert, 260; Jackson, 191).
41. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 3.49 (Kohler, vol. 2, 218).
42. “The Great Yassa of Jenghiz Khan,” in *Fundamental Principles of Mongol Law*, ed. Valentin A. Riasanovsky, Uralic and Altaic series, vol. 43 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 84.
43. William Chester Jordan, *The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 146–47.
44. *Ibid.*, 25–26; also Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, vol. 1, *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, trans. Siân Reynolds (London: William Collins and Sons, 1981), 120–24.
45. Jordan, *Great Famine*, 16–21, 24–39. See also Henry S. Lucas, “The Great Famine of 1315, 1316, and 1317,” *Speculum* 5 (1930): 343–77 and Ian Kershaw, “The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England, 1315–1322,” *Past and Present* 59 (1973): 3–50.
46. Translated in David Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders* (London: Longman, 1992), 207.
47. Jordan, *Great Famine*, 14.
48. Braudel, *Structures of Everyday Life*, 74.
49. *Ibid.*, 105, also 190–96.
50. C. C. Dyer, “Seasonal Patterns in Food Consumption in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition*, ed. C. M. Woolgar, D. Sejeantson, and T. Waldron, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 201–14 at 213; see also his *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 157–60, 258–73.
51. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 72 (Ronchi, 395; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 180).
52. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 113 (Ronchi, 459; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 265).
53. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 128 (Ronchi, 486–87; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 297).
54. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 138 (Ronchi, 496; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 308).
55. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 142 (Ronchi, 502; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 315).
56. Morris Rossabi, “The Reign of Khubilai Khan,” in *Cambridge History of China*, ed. Franke and Twitchett, vol. 6, 414–89 at 429.
57. Quoted in Braudel, *Structures of Everyday Life*, 151.
58. Braudel, *Structures of Everyday Life*, 152, also 199–201.
59. *Letter of Prester John*, sections 21, 24–25, 31 (Zarncke, 912, 914; Uebel, 156).
60. Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, ed. and trans. Horace Leonard Jones, 8 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1917–32), vol. 7, bk. 15.1.20.

61. Mela, *Mela's Description of the World*, trans. Romer, bk. 3.62.
62. Odoric, *Relatio*, IX.1–2, X.1 (Wyngaert, 439–40; Yule, vol. 2, 136, 137), XIII.1 (Wyngaert, 447; Yule, vol. 2, 153–54).
63. Odoric, *Relatio*, XIV.1–2 (Wyngaert, 447–48; Yule, vol. 2, 155–59). Yule suggests that these products are, respectively, sago, molasses, and toddy.
64. Odoric, *Relatio*, XV.1–2 (Wyngaert, 450–51; Yule, vol. 2, 163–65).
65. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 21 (Deluz, 345, 347–48).
66. Odoric, *Relatio*, XIX.2, XX.2–3, XXI.3 (Wyngaert, 458, 459, 461; Yule, vol. 2, 178, 181–82, 185). On Cockaigne in European fantasy, see Herman Pleij, *Dreaming of Cockaigne: Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life*, trans. Diane Webb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
67. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXII.3 (Wyngaert, 462; Yule, vol. 2, 189–90).
68. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXIII.4 (Wyngaert, 465; Yule, vol. 2, 199).
69. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 22 (Deluz, 360).
70. Odoric, *Relatio*, XX.4 (Wyngaert, 459–60; Yule, vol. 2, 182), XXXI.1 (Wyngaert, 482–83; Yule, vol. 2, 240–41); Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 29 (Deluz, 427).
71. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, paras. 25–31 (Gadrat, 247–48; Yule, vol. 3, 13–16).
72. Monte Corvino, Epistola 3 (Wyngaert, 354; Yule, vol. 3, 57).
73. For “Menentillus’s” letter see John of Monte Corvino, Epistola 1 (Wyngaert, 342; Yule, vol. 3, 61–62). The letter is widely thought to have come from the hand of Monte Corvino, but that is not certain (see p. 39).
74. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. I.6 (Kohler, vol. 2, 126; Burger, 12).
75. “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan,” ed. Jacquet, 61, 64–65 (Yule, vol. 3, 91–92, 95–96).
76. Marignolli, *Relatio* (Wyngaert, 530–31, 536; Yule, vol. 3, 217, 228, 235–38, the last not in Wyngaert).
77. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 154, 156, 157, 159–60, 161, 162, 163–64, 171; Jones and Hammond, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21–22, 34).
78. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 18 (Deluz, 320–21); see “Der Brief des Priesters Johannes,” ed. Zarncke, 912.
79. Witte, *Itinerarius* (Westrem, 149; trans., 223).
80. Marignolli, *Relatio* (Wyngaert, 531–32; Yule, vol. 3, 220).
81. Marignolli, *Relatio* (not in Wyngaert; Yule, vol. 3, 226).
82. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 152 (Ronchi, 515; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 332).
83. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 174 (Ronchi, 557; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 388).
84. See Monte Corvino, Epistola 1 (Wyngaert, 343; Yule, vol. 3, 64).
85. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 160–63; Jones and Hammond, 16–21).
86. Albala, *Eating Right*, 127–28.
87. Paul Freedman explores late medieval cravings for spices in *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).
88. Carpin, *Historia*, V.10 (Menestò, 258; Dawson, 22).
89. For Chinese thinking on food and eating in the premodern era, see Joanna Waley-Cohen, “The Quest for Balance: Taste and Gastronomy in Imperial China,” in *Food: The History of Taste*, ed. Paul Freedman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), esp. 99–110, and for food extravagance among the late medieval nobility, see the many works by C. M. Woolgar, including “Feasting and Fasting: Food and Taste in Europe in the Middle Ages,” in the same volume, 163–95.
90. On the “cornucopia” image of the distant East, see Timothy Morton, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 53–54 and Paul Freedman, “Spices and Late-Medieval European Ideas of Scarcity and Value,” *Speculum* 80 (2005): 1209–27, esp. 1217.
91. Albala, *Eating Right*, 8, 10, 12–13; also 96, 109–10.
92. Freedman, “Spices,” esp. 1217–24.
93. *Letter of Prester John*, section 44 (Zarncke, 915; Uebel, 157).
94. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 99, 103–4 (Ronchi, 446–47, 449–50; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 247–51 at 250).
95. “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan,” ed. Jacquet, 61, 64 (Yule, vol. 3, 91–92, 95–96), translation modified.
96. Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, 117–20.

97. *Le Livre des Merveilles: Marco Polo, Odoric de Pordenone, Mandeville, Hayton, etc., Reproduction des 265 Miniatures du Manuscrit Français 2810 de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 2 vols. (Berthaud Frères, Paris, n.d.), fig. 118; Oxford, Bodleian MS Bodley 264, fol. 244r; London, BL MS Royal 19 D.1, fol. 95.

98. Peter Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Willem Jongman and Rudolf Dekker, "Public Intervention in the Food Supply in Preindustrial Europe," in *Bad Year Economics: Cultural Responses to Risk and Uncertainty*, ed. Paul Halstead and John O'Shea (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 114–22.

99. Jordan, *Great Famine*, 162, 168–69, 171–74, 181; Kershaw, "Great Famine," 6, 9.

100. Peter Idley, *Peter Idley's Instructions to His Son*, ed. Charlotte d'Evelyn (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 132.

101. C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 114.

102. Blurton, *Cannibalism*, 105.

103. W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Marshall Sahlins, "Cannibalism: An Exchange," *New York Review of Books* 26, no. 4 (22 March 1979): 45–53; Frank Lestrangant, *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen, eds., *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Gananath Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

104. Like Arens and Hulme, my view is agnostic: "the question of whether or not people eat each other is taken as interesting but moot. But if the idea that they do is commonly accepted without adequate documentation, then the reason for this state of affairs is an even more intriguing problem." Arens, *Man-Eating Myth*, 9; also Peter Hulme, "Making No Bones: A Response to Myra Jehlen," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1993): 179–86 at 185.

105. "Caniba means simply the people of the Great Khan, who must live very near here and will have ships; they must come to capture these people, and when they do not return it is supposed that they have been eaten." Christopher Columbus, *The Voyage of Christopher Columbus: Columbus's Own Journal of Discovery Newly Restored and Translated*, ed. and trans. John Cummins (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 137. On the etymology of "cannibalism," see Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London: Methuen, 1986), 13–43; Lestrangant, *Cannibals*, 15–23; and more fully in John Bevan-Smith, "The New Cannibal Club: Deconstructing History in Aotearoa New Zealand" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Auckland, 2013), ch. 4. The *Androphagi* first appear in Herodotus's *Histories*, bk. 4, sections 18, 100, 102, 106, and 125, where they are described as the most savage of the eastern peoples and the only ones in their region to eat humans: Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt, revised by John Marincola (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), 223, 247, 248, 249, 254. Existing works on medieval representations of humans eating human flesh tend to use "cannibal/ism"; for example, Jill Tattersall, "Anthropophagi and Eaters of Raw Flesh in French Literature of the Crusade Period: Myth, Tradition and Reality," *Medium Aevum* 57 (1988): 240–53; Gregory G. Guzman, "Reports of Mongol Cannibalism in the Thirteenth-Century Latin Sources: Oriental Fact or Western Fiction?" in *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination*, ed. Scott D. Westrem (New York: Garland, 1991), 31–68; Heng, *Empire of Magic*; Merrill Llewelyn Price, *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2003), though at 111n6 she acknowledges the potential for anachronism; and Blurton, *Cannibalism*.

106. Subtle explorations of meanings surrounding "giants," who cannot be readily included in categories of either "man" or "beast," are found in Cohen, *Of Giants*.

107. Blurton, *Cannibalism*, 107–11.

108. See Schmieder, "Menschenfresser und andere Stereotypen gewalttätiger Fremder," 159–79.

109. *Chronicle of Novgorod*, trans. Michell and Forbes, 96–97.

110. Guzman, "Reports of Mongol Cannibalism." He also quotes a passage from Rubruck, but this deals with Tibetans and so will be dealt with later. Blurton suggests Matthew's depictions of Tartar anthropophagy are meant in part to expose dangerous divisions within Christendom that threaten it as much as the Mongol forces threatening its boundaries

(Cannibalism, 81–103).

111. Quoted in Guzman, “Reports of Mongol Cannibalism,” 34; Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 386–89).

112. Vincent of Beauvais, *Spec. hist.*, XXX.77, 78 (Richard, 38, 41; Guzman trans. in “Reports of Mongol Cannibalism,” 36).

113. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 76; Giles, vol. 1, 312–13).

114. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 6, 77; Giles, vol. 3, 451).

115. Matthew Paris *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 273). I do not quote Giles’s slightly free translation.

116. Cambridge, CCC MS 16, fol. 166, reproduced in Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the “Chronica Majora”* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), 285 and in M. R. James, “The Drawings of Matthew Paris,” *The Fourteenth Volume of the Walpole Society, 1925–6* (1926): 1–25, plate XVI.

117. Guzman, “Reports of Mongol Cannibalism,” 32.

118. *Ibid.*, 47.

119. Pseudo-Methodius, “Methodii Revelationes,” translated in Jane Acomb Leake, *The Geats of Beowulf: A Study in the Geographical Mythology of the Middle Ages* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 40.

120. For example, Cambridge, CCC 66A contains the *Liber Methodii* as well as one of only five extant copies of Rubruck’s book, *The Letter of Prester John*, works of Gerald of Wales on Ireland and Wales, and several on the Holy Land; while Cambridge, CCC 275 contains the Methodius plus Mandeville, Prester John, and Odoric, as well as the life of St. Brendan and a work on Saracens.

121. This section was introduced with Interpolation C by 1221 (Zarncke, 911).

122. Connell, “Western Views of the Origin of the ‘Tartars,’” 115–37.

123. These sources have often been discussed: see, for example, Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London: Athlone, 1986), 66, 181n45; Tattersall, “Anthropophagi,” 247–50; Price, *Consuming Passions*, 8–9; and most fully by Geraldine Heng, “Cannibalism, the First Crusade, and the Genesis of Medieval Romance,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 10 (1998): 98–174, and Blurton, *Cannibalism*.

124. Richard Coer de Lyon. *Der Mittelenglische Versroman Richard Löwenherz*, ed. Karl Brunner (Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1913). Geraldine Heng ambitiously suggests the romance performs a “restorative” function for Christian Europeans suffering a kind of post-anthropophagic trauma, two centuries or more after the massacre at Ma’arra an-Numan (“Cannibalism,” reprinted as ch. 1 of *Empire of Magic*). In contrast, see Blurton, *Cannibalism*, 120–31, for more detailed discussion of variations between the two main manuscript traditions, an interesting consideration of the work’s construction of a monstrous and “devilish” Richard, and argument for its perversion of chanson de geste tropes to aid in construction of English nationalism.

125. Julia Marvin, “Cannibalism as an Aspect of Famine in Two English Chronicles,” in *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martha Carlin and Joel T. Rosenthal (London: Hambledon, 1998), 73–86; Jordan, *Great Famine*, 149–50.

126. Guzman, “Reports of Mongol Cannibalism,” 52; St. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, bk. II.7, translated for New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/30092.htm> (accessed 1 October 2008).

127. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 3.29 (Kohler, vol. 2, 179–80; Berger, 45–46); Riccold, *Pérégrination*, 7vb (Kappler, 88).

128. *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, 119, 121, 179.

129. Carpini, *Historia*, V.14 (Menestò, 260–61; Dawson, 23); Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXVI.3 (Wyngaert, 234; Jackson, 158); Odoric, *Relatio*, XXXIII.3 (Wyngaert, 485–86; Yule, vol. 2, 252–54); Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 34 (Deluz, 474).

130. Price, *Consuming Passions*, 4–5.

131. Herodotus, *Histories*, bk. 4.26 (De Sélincourt and Marincola, 225; on the Issedonians, see also 80, 221, 222, 224, 226).

132. Herodotus, *Histories*, bk. 1.216, 3.38, 3.99 (De Sélincourt and Marincola, 85, 169, 194).

133. E. M. Murphy and J. P. Mallory, “Herodotus and the Cannibals,” *Antiquity* 74 (2000): 388–94.

134. Strabo, *Geography*, bks. 7.3.6, 7.3.7, 7.3.9 (Jones, vol. 3, 189, 195–97, 205).

135. Mela's *Description of the World*, bk. 2.9 (Romer, 71), and he speaks of the "Anthrophagi" in bk. 2.14 (72) and bk. 3.59 (118); the parent-eating Indians are in bk. 3.64 (119).
136. Gaius Julius Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, ed. Theodor Mommsen (Berlin: Friderici Nicolai, 1864), ch. 15 (84).
137. *The Hereford Map: A Transcription and Translation of the Legends with Commentary*, ed. and trans. Scott D. Westrem (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), paras. 212, 142.
138. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 168 (Ronchi, 546–47; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 375).
139. Odoric, *Relatio*, XVIII.1–4 (Wyngaert, 455–57; Yule, vol. 2, 175–76). See Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 22 (Deluz, 357).
140. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 166 (Ronchi, 543; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 371).
141. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 81 (Gadrat, 255; Yule, 31).
142. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 156, 157; Jones and Hammond, 11, 12). Anthony Reid claims identification of Sumatrans as anthropophagi goes back to Ptolemy, c. 100 CE, and exists in Arab and Indian as well as European sources: *Is There a Batak History?* Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series, no. 78 (Singapore, 2006), 11.
143. Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Rieu, rev. Rieu and Jones, bk. 9, 132–33; Strabo, *Geography*, ed. and trans. Jones, bk. 7.3.6 (vol. 3, 189) and bk. 7.3.7 (vol. 3, 195–97).
144. Odoric, *Relatio*, XII.3 (Wyngaert, 446; Yule, vol. 2, 148–49).
145. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 20 (Deluz, 332).
146. Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Rieu, rev. Rieu and Jones, bk. 9; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Romance of Alexander the Great*, translated from the Armenian version by Albert Muirhead Wolohojian (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 113–14; *An Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany: British Library Cotton Tiberius B.V Part 1, Together with Leaves from British Library Cotton Nero D. II*, ed. P. McGurk et al. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1983), fol. 83v, col. 1.
147. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 172 (Ronchi, 549; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 378).
148. Odoric, *Relatio*, XVI.1–4 (Wyngaert, 452–53; Yule, vol. 2, 169–70).
149. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 31 (Deluz, 448–49); see also 194, below.
150. Witte, *Itinerarius* (Westrem, 130; trans., 211).
151. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 75 (Ronchi, 402; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 188–89).
152. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 161 (Ronchi, 536; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 364).
153. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 155 (Ronchi, 524; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 345–46).
154. Key Ray Chong, *Cannibalism in China* (Wakefield, NH: Longwood Academic, 1990), 79–82, 85–92 (though his reading takes the annals at face value more than seems advisable).
155. Arens, *Man-Eating Myth*, 165.
156. Jordan, *Great Famine*, 149.

157. Albalá, *Alting Right*, 226–27.
158. *Ibid.*, 233–34.

CHAPTER 5

1. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 190.
2. This section deals in shorter, revised form with material in my essay “Warriors, Amazons, and Isles of Women: Medieval Travel Writing and Constructions of Asian Femininities,” in *Intersections of Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Cordelia Beattie and Kirsten A. Fenton (London: Palgrave, 2010), 183–207.
3. Carpini, *Historia*, IV.11, IV.10, 11.5 (Menestò, 251, 234; Dawson, 18, 7–8). Mandeville repeats much of this, working from Vincent of Beauvais’s extracts of Carpini: *Livre*, ch. 26 (Deluz, 405–8).
4. Carpini, *Historia*, IV.3 (Menestò, 246; Dawson, 15).
5. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, II.4–5, VI.2–4, VII.1–2 (Wyngaert, 173–74, 182–84; Jackson, 74, 88, 90–91).
6. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, VI.5 (Wyngaert, 183; Jackson, 89).
7. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, X.3, XXVIII.14 (Wyngaert, 190, 249; Jackson, 100, 178).
8. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 69 (Ronchi, 387; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 169).
9. Riccold, *Pérégrination*, 7rb–8ra (Kappler, 84–88, quotes at 84, 88), my translations.
10. These examples are discussed in Morris Rossabi, “Khubilai Khan and the Women in His Family,” in *Studia Sino-Mongolica: Festschrift für Herbert Franke*, ed. Wolfgang Bauer (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979), 153–80 (and see his *Khubilai Khan*, 11–14 on Sorghaghtani Beki and 67–69 on Chabi) and Herbert Franke, “Women Under the Dynasties of Conquest,” in *La donna nella Cina imperiale e nella Cina repubblicana*, ed. Lionello Lanciotti (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1980), 23–43. See also James D. Ryan, “Christian Wives of Mongol Khans: Tartar Queens and Missionary Expectations in Asia,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8 (1998): 411–21.
11. Bettine Birge, “Women and Confucianism from Song to Ming: The Institutionalization of Patrilineality,” in *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, ed. Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 230–38 and her *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Song and Yuan China (960–1368)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 254–77; also Jennifer Holgrem, “Observations on Marriage and Inheritance Practices in Early Mongol and Yuan Society with Particular Reference to the Levirate,” *Journal of Asian History* 20 (1986): 127–92 at 138–40. “Levirate” marriage refers to the practice of a widow marrying one of her husband’s brothers to preserve the deceased man’s lineage.
12. Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, bk. 95 (Wailly, 174; Hague, 148).
13. Schiltberger, *Reisebuch*, ch. 29 (Langmantel, 43; Telfer, 37–38).
14. Paris, Bib. Nat., fr. ms. 2180, fols. 276, 277v.
15. London, British Library, Egerton MS 1982, fol. 103r (see Letts, vol. 1, 172).
16. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 201 (ch. 200 in Moule and Pelliot) (Ronchi, 618–20; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 453–55). On Qaidu (“Caidu”), see Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1959–73), vol. 1, no. 95 (124–29).
17. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 201/200 (Ronchi, 620; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 455).
18. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 1, no. 12 (15). Pelliot claims that *Ai-yaruq*, meaning “Moonshine,” is a common Turkish name for a woman; also *Book of Ser Marco Polo*, ed. Yule, vol. 2, 465–66, note 1. Both remark that the story is also told by Rashid al-Din and see similarities with Ibn Battutah’s story of Queen Urdujah.
19. Jennifer R. Goodman, *Chivalry and Exploration, 1298–1630* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998), 96 compares Aigiarc to Turandot, Atalanta, and Floriapas. Yule sees similarities with Herodotus’s Amazons and Brunhild in the “Nibelungen,” *Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 2, 466.
20. Carpini, *Historia*, VI.14 (Menestò, 281–82; Dawson, 36).
21. Mongols did indeed learn to ride and hunt with arrows from an early age, as Chinggis Khân explained to the Taoist monk Ch’ang Ch’un (Qui Chuji), who traveled to the court of Chinggis in 1221–24, after the monk chided him for boar hunting: “we Mongols are brought up from childhood to shoot arrows and ride. Such a habit is not easy to lay aside.” Li Chih-

Ch'ang, "Hsi Yu Chi (Travels to the West)," in *The Travels of an Alchemist: The Journey of the Taoist Ch'ang-Ch'un from China to the Hindukush at the Summons of Chingiz Khan*, trans. Arthur Waley (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1931), 118.

22. 'Ala-ad-Din 'Ata-Malik Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. J. A. Boyle, 2 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), vol. 1, 177.

23. Rossabi, "Khubilai Khan and the Women," 154, 172–73; his *Khubilai Khan*, 104–6, 252n132 expands on his earlier summary on Khutulan (Qutulan), taking into account Olschki's skepticism about veracity (in *Marco Polo's Asia*, 357).

24. Franke, "Women Under the Dynasties of Conquest," 36.

25. *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, vol. 1, 117.

26. See also *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, vol. 1, 206. "As they rode off, Büri said, 'Since Batu, then, is equal to us, why should he have drunk first? Old women with beards like him, / Who pretend to be one's equal, / One should push with one's heels, / One should trample under one's feet.' On that Güyük said, 'These old women with quivers like Batu—let us also strike their bosoms with a stick of burning wood—those ones!'"

27. For example, *Secret History*, trans. de Rachewiltz, vol. 1, 37, 39, 42–43, 49, 79, 124, 166.

28. These points are explained in Chapter 2.

29. This may be what Igor de Rachewiltz means in saying that "during a campaign all hands were mobilized, and if necessary even women and children took part in the combat" (*Papal Envoys*, 56).

30. Clavijs, *Relacion* (le Strange, 297–98).

31. "The Great Yassa of Jenghiz Khan," ed. Riasanovsky, 84. The code has been much debated by Mongolists. For example, D. O. Morgan has expressed misgivings about this collection's status as a law code from the time of Chinggis in "The 'Great Yasa of Chingiz Khan' and Mongol Law in the Ilkhanate," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 49 (1986): 163–76, rebutted in many respects by Igor de Rachewiltz, "Some Reflections on Chinggis Qan's *Jasag*," *East Asian History* 6 (1993): 91–104, but pursued further by Morgan (drawing in part on the work of several other scholars) in "The 'Great Yasa of Chinggis Khan' Revisited," in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 291–308.

32. James D. Ryan, "Women in Mongol Society," in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration*, ed. Friedman and Figg, 651–52, quote at 651.

33. Pei-Yi Wu, "Yang Miaozen: A Woman Warrior in Thirteenth-Century China," *Nan Nü* 4 (2002): 137–69; see also (for a later period but including a broad overview of the theme) Louise Edwards, "Women Warriors and Amazons of the Mid-Qing Texts *Jinghua yuan* and *Honglou meng*," *Modern Asian Studies* 29 (1995): 225–55.

34. Megan McLaughlin, "The Woman Warrior: Gender, Warfare and Society in Medieval Europe," *Women's Studies* 17 (1990): 193–209.

35. David Hay, "Canon Laws Regarding Female Military Commanders up to the Time of Gratian: Some Texts and Their Historical Contexts," in *A Great Effusion of Blood? Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thierry, and Oren Falk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 287–323; also Kimberly A. LoPrete, "Gendering Viragos: Medieval Perceptions of Powerful Women," in *Victims or Viragos? Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), vol. 4, 17–38. James M. Blythe offers a detailed summary of the warrior woman tradition from Plato to fourteenth-century political theorists in "Women in the Military: Scholastic Arguments and Medieval Images of Female Warriors," *History of Political Thought* 22 (2001): 242–69. I owe these references to Dr. Michelle Smith.

36. Andrew of Wyntoun, *The Orignale Cronykil of Scotland*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872), vol. 3, 430; Norman Davis, ed., *The Paston Letters: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), nos. 63, 70–71.

37. Many of the examples cited in Blythe, "Women in the Military," 245–51, illustrate this point.

38. *Letter of Prester John*, section 55 (Zarncke, 917; Uebel, 158); Slessarev, *Prester John*, facsimile (unpaginated), and translation, 70; Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 17 (Deluz, 302–3); Clavijs, *Relation*, bk. 3 (Estrada, 191–92; le Strange, 293–94).

39. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 189 (Ronchi, 589–90; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 424–25); Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 116 (Gadrat, 260; Yule, 44); Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4

(Merisalo, 165; Jones and Hammond, 24); Witte, "Itinerarius" (Westrem, 142–43; trans., 219–20). It is possible that Marco derived his story from far eastern legends and was imitated by these later authors. For eastern parallels, see Pelliot, "Femeles (Islands of Women)," in *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 2, no. 230 (671–725).

40. Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 9, 170–71. Also Adam Kosto, "Amazons," in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration*, ed. Friedman and Figg, 17–18; Lorraine K. Stock, "Amazons," in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Schaus (New York: Routledge, 2006), 16–17. Compare Vincent DiMarco, "The Amazons and the End of the World," in *Discovering New Worlds*, ed. Westrem; Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xxvii, 103–38.

41. Carpini, *Historia*, V.10 (Menestò, 258; Dawson, 22).

42. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 72 (Ronchi, 396; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 180–81).

43. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 152, 155 (Ronchi, 514, 525; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 330, 346).

44. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. I.1 (Kohler, vol. 2, 121; Burger, 7).

45. Odoric, *Relatio*, XIX.2 (Wyngaert, 458; Yule, vol. 2, 179).

46. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 22 (Deluz, 360).

47. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXXIV.2 (Wyngaert, 487–88; Yule, vol. 2, 256). He also mentions the fashion for noblemen of Manzi to grow their nails long, the thumbnail sometimes curling right round the hand. A valuable essay on this subject is Folker Reichert, "Odorico da Pordenone and the European Perception of Chinese Beauty in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval History* 25 (1999): 339–55.

48. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 34 (Deluz, 475–76), also mentioning the long fingernails.

49. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 47, 49 (Ronchi, 361–62, 363; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 138–39, 140).

50. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 174 (Ronchi, 560–61; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 393–94).

51. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 143.

52. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 192 (Ronchi, 597; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 433).

53. Kim M. Phillips, "Beauty," in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Schaus (New York: Routledge, 2006), 64–66.

54. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "Gender and Sinology: Shifting Western Interpretations of Footbinding, 1300–1890," in *Women and the Family in Chinese History* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 194–219 at 201.

55. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 95 (Ronchi, 437; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 236).

56. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 152 (Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 328–29).

57. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 167; Jones and Hammond, 27).

58. Fr. Gaspar de Cruz, *Treatise in which the things of China are related at great length*, in *South China in the Sixteenth Century, being the narratives of Galeote Pereira, Fr. Gaspar de Cruz, and Fr. Martin de Rada (1550–1575)*, ed. and trans. C. R. Boxer, Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., no. 106 (London, 1953), 149, 150–51.

59. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 134 (Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 304–5).

60. Susan Mann's essay on Chinese images and types of womanhood further serves to underscore the poverty of medieval European perspectives: "Presidential Address: Myths of Asian Womanhood," *Journal of Asian Studies* 59 (2000): 835–62.

61. The following summary is based on Patricia Ebrey, "Women, Marriage, and the Family in Chinese History," in *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, ed. Paul S. Ropp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 197–223 and Birge, "Women and Confucianism from Song to Ming." See also Kathryn Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China, 960–1949* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) and Holgrem, "Observations on Marriage."

62. Ebrey, "Women, Marriage and the Family," 200–206.

63. Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 10–13.

64. See, however, Patricia Ebrey, "Women in the Kinship System of the Southern Song Upper Class," in *Women in China*, ed. Richard W. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen (Youngstown, NY: Philo Press, 1981), 113–28 and Birge, "Women and Confucianism from Song to Ming," 230–38.

65. Ebrey, "Women, Marriage and the Family," 203–4 and in more detail in Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1993), 27–29. See also Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, 152–56.

66. Birge, “Women and Confucianism from Song to Ming,” 213–21, and explored in great detail in her *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction*, esp. 4.

67. Ebrey, “Women, Marriage and the Family,” 220–21. On foot binding, see also Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

68. Birge, “Women and Confucianism from Song to Ming,” 230–38; Birge, *Women, Property and Confucian Reaction*, 254–77; Franke, “Women Under the Dynasties,” 38–40.

69. Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 21–27; see also Birge, *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction*, 26–28.

70. Quoted in Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 131–32.

71. Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 132.

72. *Ibid.*, 145.

73. Jacques Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250–1276*, trans. H. M. Wright (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), 165.

74. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 120 (Ronchi, 473–74; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 281–82).

75. Li Jing, “The Customs of Various Barbarians,” trans. Jacqueline M. Armijo-Hussein, in *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*, ed. Susan Mann and Yu-Yin Cheng (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 93.

76. Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, 10.

77. The secondary literature on this subject is large and growing. Key studies include Alice A. Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique du moyen âge s’adressant spécialement aux femmes* (Cahors: A. Coueslant, 1903); Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, CT: Shoestring Press, 1983), ch. 4; Kathleen M. Ashley, “Medieval Courtesy Literature and Dramatic Mirrors of Female Conduct,” in *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York: Methuen, 1987), 25–38; Silvana Vecchio, “The Goodwife,” in *A History of Women in the West*, vol. 2, *Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), 105–35; Felicity Riddy, “Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text,” *Speculum* 71 (1996): 66–86; essays by Krueger, Ashley, Rasmussen, and Dronzek in *Medieval Conduct*, ed. Ashley and Clark; and Roberta Krueger, “Identity Begins at Home: Female Conduct and the Failure of Counsel in Le Menagier de Paris,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 21–39.

78. Bornstein, *Lady in the Tower*, 46–75; Kim M. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270–1540* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 83–95.

79. Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 115. For the Yuan “faithful wife,” see Beverly Bossler, “Gender and Empire: A View from Yuan China,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 197–223.

80. Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 119.

81. *Ibid.*, 124–28; Hilary M. Carey, “Devout Literate Laypeople and the Pursuit of the Mixed Life in Later Medieval England,” *Journal of Religious History* 14 (1989): 361–81. Where Chinese “inner helpers” differed from European goodwives was in their learnedness, though Ebrey suspects that the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the later Song period discouraged women’s literary creativity, so by the Yuan period it is possible that this added accomplishment had all but disappeared (*Inner Quarters*, 122–23). It is unlikely that in other respects the ideal of the “inner helper” altered much in the transition from the Song to the Yuan eras.

82. “In its primary sense, *sati* simply means ‘a virtuous wife, faithful to her conjugal vow,’ and comes to take on the meaning of a ‘wife who immolates herself on her husband’s funeral pyre.’” Catherine Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and David Gordon White (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 11, as well as 1, 20, 21.

83. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” quotes at 305, emphasis in original.

84. Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality*, 21.

85. On self-decapitation and other suicidal acts as forms of devotion, see Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 169–70; Jones and Hammond, 32–33); Odoric, *Relatio*, XI.4–5 (Wyngaert, 444; Yule, vol. 2, 144–45); Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 84 (Gadrat, 256; Yule, 32–33); and Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 19 (Deluz, 328–29).

86. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 174 (Ronchi, 557; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 387).
87. Odoric, *Relatio*, X.4 (Wyngaert, 441; Yule, vol. 2, 139–40).
88. Odoric, *Relatio*, XV.4 (Wyngaert, 452; Yule, vol. 2, 166).
89. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 45 (Gadrat, 250; Yule, 20–21).
90. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 18 (Deluz, 322).
91. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 167–68; Jones and Hammond, 27–28).
92. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 168; Jones and Hammond, 29).
93. Hieronimo, “Journey of Hieronimo di Santo Stefano,” trans. Major, 5–6.
94. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 173–74.
95. Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality*, 13–14.
96. *Ibid.*, 16–18.
97. *Ibid.*, 89–90.
98. Joerg Fisch, *Burning Women: A Global History of Widow Sacrifice from Ancient Times to the Present*, trans. Rekha Kamath Rajan (London: Seagull, 2006), 217–18.
99. *Ibid.*, 211–12, 224–43.
100. Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality*, 85–101. Cf. Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 158–90. Also Pompa Banerjee, *Burning Women: Widows, Witches, and Early Modern European Travellers in India* (New York, Palgrave, 2003), 35–71, critiqued by Andrea Major, *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37–38.
101. Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality*, 38–43; Mala Sen, *Death by Fire: Sati, Dowry Death, and Female Infanticide in Modern India* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 23–26. Andrea Major offers a valuable study of western descriptions of widow burning from antiquity to the present in *Pious Flames*.
102. See, for example, Dorothy M. Figueira, “Die Flambierte Frau: Sati in European Culture” and Robin Jared Lewis, “Comment: Sati and the Nineteenth-Century British Self,” in *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 55–72 and 72–78.
103. Mani, *Contentious Traditions*; Sen, *Death by Fire*; Fisch, *Burning Women*, 364–457; Major, *Pious Flames*, esp. 184–225.
104. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (New York: D. Appleton, 1869), 38.

CHAPTER 6

1. Iacopo [Jacopo] d’Acqui, *Imago mundi seu chronica*, extracts, translated in Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 493–94, from a fourteenth-century manuscript, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana MS. D 526, with some additions from a 1428 source, Trivulziano 704. They note that two manuscripts of the *Imago mundi* in the Biblioteca Nazionale at Turin do not include the Marco Polo passages—although they do contain the paragraph on the Old Man of the Mountains (see note 2)—and that they cannot be certain that the extracts from the *Divisament* were included in the original of Jacopo’s text.

2. In addition, he includes a version of the popular tale of the Old Man of the Mountains, here located “in the parts of the north” although in other medieval texts it was usually associated with the Middle East. It tells of the eponymous Old Man who buys up baby boys and girls and brings them up together in his mountain stronghold where they enjoy every kind of pleasure. When the boys reach thirty they are given a sleeping potion and removed from their Earthly Paradise and on waking they remember “the Paradise where they were brought up, and weep for love of the girls and the pleasures amidst which they were.” Capitalizing on their sense of loss, the Old Man promises to grant them leave to return provided they obey him faithfully in all things; thus he procures their willingness to go out into the world and assassinate persons by contract and thereby gains great wealth: Iacopo d’Acqui, *Imago mundi*, trans. Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 491–92. Versions of the story are very common, spread first by crusade propagandists, and relate to western myths surrounding an important breakaway Isma’ili group, known to the West as the Assassins (from the Arabic *hashashin*, for the hashish the Assassin forces were rumored to be drugged with). They were formed by Hasan ibn Sabbah when he seized a mountain fortress in northern Persia in 1090. Among our travelers, see Marco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 41–43 (Ronchi, 352–56; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, W8–33); Odoric, *Relatio*, XXXV (Wyngaert, 488–89; Yule, vol. 2, 257–60, and

see Yule's note, 257–58, note 3); and Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 30 (Deluz, 440–42). For an almost identical story in a Chinese text from 1252, see Ch'ang Te, "Si Shi Ki (Record of an Embassy to the Regions in the West)," in *Mediaeval Researches*, trans. Bretschneider, vol. 1, 135–36. Among secondary scholarship, see Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967) and Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (London: Tauris, 1994).

3. Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1992), quotes at 81, xii, 12.

4. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 171 (Ronchi, 549; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 377–78).

5. Note that fifteenth-century German and Latin versions add more negative remarks to the passage. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 172, 174 (Ronchi, 550–53, 559; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 379, 383, 390).

6. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 180 (Ronchi, 580; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 416).

7. Odoric, *Relatio*, XII.1–2 (Wyngaert, 445; Yule, vol. 2, 147).

8. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 20 (Deluz, 331–32).

9. Odoric, *Relatio*, XVI.1–3 (Wyngaert, 452–53; Yule, vol. 2, 169).

10. Monte Corvino, Epistola 3 (Wyngaert, 354; Yule, vol. 3, 57).

11. See Monte Corvino, Epistola 1 (Wyngaert, 343; Yule, vol. 3, 63–64).

12. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 1.6 (Kohler, vol. 2, 126; Burger, 12).

13. Jordanus, *Mirabilia*, paras. 77, 82 (Gadrat, 255; Yule, vol. 3, 30, 32).

14. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 177 (Ronchi, 570–71; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 404–5).

15. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 177 (Ronchi, 571–72; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 406). These "idolaters" are also called "cruel and treacherous."

16. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 178 (Ronchi, 573–74; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 408).

17. Marignolli, *Relatio* (Wyngaert, 539; Yule, vol. 3, 234).

18. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 32 (Deluz, 456–59). Letts, ed. and trans., *Mandeville's Travels*, vol. 1, 206n1 remarks that Gymnosophi(sti) is the Greek synonym for Brahmins or Bragmanni and that Mandeville must have had two separate sources for the same people.

19. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 116; for a neutral passage on the nakedness of men and women in Calicut, see *ibid.*, 139.

20. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 115 (Ronchi, 463–64; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 269–71).

21. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 117 (Ronchi, 466–67; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 273–75).

22. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 118 (Ronchi, 470; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 277).

23. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 55 (Ronchi, 368–69; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 147). A Chinese traveler in the early 1220s located a similar (but not identical) practice among the people of Samarkand: Li Chih-Ch'ang, "Hsi Yu Chi (Travels to the West)," trans. Waley, 107.

24. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 55 (Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 147), Pipino addition.

25. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 59 (Ronchi, 374–75; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 154–55).

26. Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 21, 22, fig. 13.

27. Li Jing, "Customs of Various Barbarians," 85.

28. *Ibid.*, 89.

29. *Ibid.*, 91.

30. *Ibid.*, 93.

31. *Ibid.*, 94. The Mosuo or Moso (Na) and Naxi (Nakhi) groups are separate, though they are often conflated by outsiders. The matrilineality and sexual practices among the Mosuo have attracted recent attention: for example, Chuan-kang Shih, *Quest for Harmony: The Moso Traditions of Sexual Union and Family Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

32. Dutschke, "Francesco Pipino," 25; see also 69, and 70n2 for negative reader reaction to the account of sexually experienced brides in Tibet.

33. Gadrat, "Marco Polo and the Dominicans."

34. Odoric, *Relatio*, XII.2–3 (Wyngaert, 445–46; Yule, vol. 2, 147–48).

35. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 31 (Deluz, 451–52); Letts, vol. 1, 201n3.

36. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 164–65; Jones and Hammond, 23).

37. Hieronimo, "Journey of Hieronimo di Santo Stefano," trans. Major, 5.

38. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 141.

39. Melvyn C. Goldstein, "When Brothers Share a Wife," *Natural History* 96 (1987): 39–48; Geoff Childs, "Polyandry and Population Growth in a Historical Tibetan Society," *History of the Family* 8 (2003): 423–44; Nancy E. Levine, "Fathers and Sons: Kinship Value and Validation in Tibetan Polyandry," *Man*, n.s. 22 (June 1987): 267–86; Nancy E. Levine, *The*

Dynamics of Polyandry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Nancy E. Levine and Joan B. Silk, "Why Polyandry Fails: Sources of Instability in Polyandrous Marriages," *Current Anthropology* 38 (1997): 375–98.

40. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); James A. Brundage, "Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (1975): 825–45.

41. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 31 (Deluz, 449–50), my translation

42. Letts, ed. and trans., *Mandeville's Travels*, vol. 1, 200n1, citing N. M. Penzer, *Poisoned Damsels, and Other Essays in Folklore and Anthropology* (London: Privately printed, 1952). However, most of Penzer's cross-cultural tales of poisonous women bear little in common with Mandeville's story (see 12–26).

43. Mandeville, *The Defective Version of Mandeville's Travels*, ed. M. C. Seymour, EETS o.s. 319 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 168–69.

44. Hieronimo, "Journey of Hieronimo di Santo Stefano," trans. Major, 5.

45. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 138–40.

46. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 171–72. Earlier in his narrative Ludovico had devoted several pages to the lust of the Sultana of Aden for white men's bodies, specifically his own (92–99).

47. Wolfram Eberhard, *The Local Cultures of South and East China*, trans. Alide Eberhard (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 133.

48. *Ibid.*, 110.

49. Carpini, *Historia*, II.3, IV.9 (Menestò, 233, 250–51 Dawson, 7, 7–18).

50. Carpini, *Historia*, III.8, IV.9 (Menestò, 240, 250–51 Dawson, 11, 17); Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, II.4, VII.4–5, VIII.2 (Wyngaert, 173–74, 184–85, 186; Jackson, 74, 91–92, 93); Andrew of Longjumeau in Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 6, 114); Simon of St. Quentin in Vincent of Beauvais, *Spec. hist.*, XXX.76 (*Histoire des Tartares*, ed. Richard, 37–38); Riccold, *Pérégrination*, 6va–7rb, 7va–vb (Kappler, 78–82, 86); Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 3.49 (Kohler, vol. 2, 217; Burger, 63).

51. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 3.49 (Kohler, vol. 2, 217; Burger, 63).

52. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 72 (Ronchi, 396; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 180).

53. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 82 (Ronchi, 414–15; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 205–6).

54. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 98 (Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 244).

55. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 127 (Ronchi, 485–86; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 296).

56. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 162 (Ronchi, 539; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 367–68, quote at 368).

57. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 174 (Ronchi, 555; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 385).

58. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 178 (Ronchi, 578; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 412).

59. Odoric, *Relatio*, XV.1–2 (Wyngaert, 450; Yule, vol. 2, 163–64). Compare with Rossabi on King Narathihapate of Pagan, Burma (r. 1256–87), with his reputed three thousand concubines and teams of war elephants: *Khubilai Khan*, 214.

60. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 21 (Deluz, 347).

61. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXXIV.1 (Wyngaert, 486–87; Yule, vol. 2, 254–55); Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 34 (Deluz, 475–76).

62. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 25 (Deluz, 402–3).

63. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 30 (Deluz, 439).

64. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 155; Jones and Hammond, 9).

65. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 162; Jones and Hammond, 19).

66. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 167; Jones and Hammond, 27).

67. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 117.

68. Marco, *Divisament*, ch. 139 (Ronchi, 497; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 309–10).

69. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 152, Ramusio addition (Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 338–39, note 3).

70. See, for example, Marco Polo, *Travels*, trans. Latham, 225–27 (cf. Ronchi, 518).

71. The following section is expanded in my essay, "They do not know the use of men": The Absence of Sodomy in Medieval Accounts of the Far East," in *Medieval Sexualities: A Casebook*, ed. April Harper and Caroline Proctor (New York: Garland, 2008), 189–208.

72. Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1.

73. Galeote Pereira, "Certain reports of China, learned through the Portugals there

imprisoned, and chiefly by the relation of Galeote Pereira, a gentleman of good credit, that lay prisoner in that country many years," in *South China in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Boxer, 16–17.

74. Fr. Gaspar da Cruz, "Treatise in which the things of China are related at great length, with their particularities, as likewise is the kingdom of Ormuz," in *South China in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Boxer, 223–27.

75. Quoted in Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking, 1984), 220.

76. Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, vol. 16, bk. 4.12.

77. Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Helmut Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); William E. Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050–1230* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). The subject is summarized in Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay, *Sex Before Sexuality: A Premodern History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), ch. 3.

78. Ludovico, *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 66.

79. Sir Richard F. Burton, "Terminal Essay," in *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night*, 16 vols. (Benares: Kamashastra Society, 1885), vol. 10, 206–7 and 238–40 for the particular prevalence of the vice among east Asians (quote at 238). See also Richard Phillips, "Travelling Sexualities: Richard Burton's Sotadic Zone," in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, ed. James Duncan and Derek Gregory (London: Routledge, 1999), 70–91.

80. For an overview and range of studies, see Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson, eds., *Asian Homosexuality* (New York: Garland, 1992); for India, see Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, eds., *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000) and essays by Kugle and Chatterjee in Ruth Vanita, ed., *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Japan had a strong pederastic tradition before the Meiji Restoration in 1868 but is not of importance here because European travelers did not reach Japan until 1543; see Michael Cooper, ed., *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543–1640* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 15, 46; Gary Leupp, *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Mongolian practices have been little studied. The "Great Yassa" law code of the thirteenth century in some versions prescribed the death penalty for anyone found guilty of either adultery or male-male sex ("Great Yassa," ed. Riasanovsky, 83).

81. For example, Robert H. van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 BC till 1644 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); Vivien Ng, "Homosexuality and the State in Late Imperial China," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman et al. (New York: Meridian Press, 1989), 76–89; Hirsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*; and Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), esp. ch. 4.

82. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 62 (Ronchi, 378; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 159).

83. Simon of St. Quentin, *Histoire des Tartares*, ed. Richard, bk. 30, ch. 76 (37), my translation.

84. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 167; Jones and Hammond, 26).

85. The prevalence of homoerotic behavior among young Florentine men of the period is exceptionally well documented: Michael J. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

86. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 158–59; Jones and Hammond, 14).

87. Francesco Carletti, *My Voyage Around the World*, trans. Herbert Weinstock (London: Methuen, 1965), 181–82. Carletti also cites Conti's account of the "rattles."

88. Ralph Fitch, "The Voyage of M. Ralph Fitch Marchant of London," in *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. Richard Hakluyt, 3 vols. (London: George Bishop et al., 1598), vol. 2, 262.

89. On political usage, see, for example, Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland*, 17–30; Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law*, 48–52, 73–85; and Robert Mills, "Male-Male Love and Sex in the Middle Ages, 1000–1500," in *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages*, ed. Matt Cook et al. (Oxford: Greenwood,

2007), 14–3 at 1–2, 6–8, 18–22. On the Templars, see Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 61–63, 163–66, 178–82, 223 and Anne Gilmour-Bryson, “Sodomy and the Knights Templar,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7 (1996): 151–83. On heretics, see Michael E. Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period* (Santa Barbara, CA: Ross-Erikson, 1979), 7–10 and Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland*. On Muslims, see John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 279–83; Steven F. Kruger, “Medieval Christian (Dis)identifications: Muslims and Jews in Guibert of Nogent,” *New Literary History* 28 (1997): 185–203; and Gregory S. Hutcheson, “The Sodomitic Moor: Queerness in the Narrative of *Reconquista*?” in *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 99–121. On international rivalries, see Rebecca E. Zorach, “The Matter of Italy: Sodomy and the Scandal of Style in Sixteenth-Century France,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 581–609. On the Americas, see Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), chs. 6, 7.

90. Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland*, 7.

91. Pegolotti, *Pratica*, ch. 2 (Evans, 21–22; Yule, vol. 3, 152).

92. Iris Origo, “The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” *Speculum* 30 (1955): 321–66.

93. Tafur, *Travels and Adventures*, trans. Letts, 84–85.

94. Steven F. Kruger, “Conversion and Medieval Sexual, Religious, and Racial Categories,” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 158–79; Benjamin Liu, “‘Affined to Love the Moor’: Sexual Misalliance and Cultural Mixing in the *Cantigas d’escarnho e de mal dizer*,” in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 48–72.

95. See the section titled “The Nakedness Topos” in this chapter for some relevant examples of sexual continence among holy men. Classically, *The Letter of Prester John* asserted the lack of adultery or vice in this ideal imagined Christian realm: section 52 (Zarncke, 916; Uebel, 157). In Marco’s book, the Bragmanni of “Lar” as well as being thoroughly honest in their business dealings, vegetarian, and teetotal “do not practise self-indulgence except with their wives”: *Divisament*, ch. 177 (Ronchi, 567; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 401). Poggio’s account says the men of Macina “are satisfied with one wife” (*De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 [Merisalo, 159; Jones and Hammond, 16]) while the vegetarian “Bachali” priests of “Cambay” also take a single wife (Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 [Merisalo, 168; Jones and Hammond, 29]).

96. Mark D. Jordan, *Blessing Same-Sex Unions: The Perils of Queer Romance and the Confusions of Christian Marriage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 164.

97. See, for example, Tolan, *Saracens*, 168; Akbari, *Idols*, 225–27, 258; and Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” 125ff.

98. Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” esp. 124–33, quotes at 124 and 125.

99. Jordan, *Blessing Same-Sex Unions*, 160–66. One brief but helpful survey, rounding up scriptural and patristic as well as later references, is Geoffrey Bullough, “Polygamy Among the Reformers,” in *Renaissance and Modern Essays Presented to Vivian de Sola Pinto in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 5–23. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 11–15, surveys Old Testament polygamy from both Jewish and medieval Christian perspectives.

100. Jordan, *Blessing Same-Sex Unions*, 160.

101. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. “marriage law,” 446–47.

102. Augustine, “The Good of Marriage,” trans. Charles T. Wilcox, in *Saint Augustine: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 22, 31–32, 42–44, 47–51. On patristic views of polygyny more generally, see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 65–66; Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Of God and His Creatures: An Annotated Translation. Summa Contra Gentiles of Saint Thomas*

Aquinas, trans. Joseph Rickaby (Westminster, MD: Carroll Press, 1950), 287–88; and Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 66–67.

103. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 128–31; Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 38–41, 75–96; Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 30, 41–44, 117–18, 149.

104. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 297–300, 359.

105. See John Witte, *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 224–26; Bullough, “Polygamy Among the Reformers,” 89–90, 90n147.

106. Captain Edward Sellon, *The Ups and Downs of Life* (London: Wm Dugdale, 1867; reprint, Ware, Herts: Wordsworth, 1996), 56. Sellon was stationed in India during 1834–44.

107. Hugh Clifford, “*Since the Beginning*”: *A Tale of an Eastern Land* (London: Grant Richards, 1898), 1, 3, 5.

108. Said, *Orientalism*, 190; Wesseling, *European Colonial Empires*, 21–23, quote at 21.

109. Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

110. See especially the works of Ann Laura Stoler, notably *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); also Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1–15; Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly, eds., *Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

111. Said, *Orientalism*, 188. He chose not to elaborate, but others have filled the gap, including Rana Kabbani, *Europe’s Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1986) and Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

112. See, for example, Ian Buruma, *The Missionary and the Libertine: Love and War in East and West* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), xiv; Sheridan Prasso, *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls, and Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 9; Islam, *Ethics of Travel*, 163–66; and Jerry Phillips, “Into the Melting Pot: Utopian and Dystopian Themes in Edmund White’s *Travels in Gay America*,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 1 (1997): 170–98 at 171. I have critiqued these in my “Oriental Sexualities in European Representation, c. 1245–c. 1500,” in *Old Worlds, New Worlds: European Cultural Encounters c. 1000–c. 1750*, ed. Lisa Bailey, Lindsay Diggelmann, and Kim M. Phillips (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 53–74.

CHAPTER 7

1. Dalrymple, *In Xanadu*, 298. See also *Book of Ser Marco Polo*, ed. Yule, vol. 1, 304–5, note 2; Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, 31–33.

2. John Gillingham, “From *Civilitas* to Civility: Codes of Manners in Medieval and Early Modern England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002): 267–89 at 280; see also his “Civilizing the English? The English Histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume,” *Historical Research* 74 (2001): 17–43.

3. Notably, Elias, *Civilizing Process*, esp. 47–52, 60–72, 87–89; Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

4. Jacques le Goff, “An Urban Metaphor of William of Auvergne,” *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 177–80.

5. <http://www.bnf.fr/en/luminures/manuscrits/aman6.htm> (accessed 7 January 2009).

6. Monte Corvino, Epistola 2 (Wyngaert, 350; Yule, vol. 3, 51).

7. Monte Corvino, Epistola 3 (Wyngaert, 353; Yule, vol. 3, 57).

8. Peregrine of Castello, Epistola (Wyngaert, 368; Dawson, 234).

9. Andrew of Perugia, Epistola (Wyngaert, 374; Yule, vol. 3, 72).

10. Odoric, *Relatio*, XIX.1 (Wynngaert, 458; Yule, vol. 2, 178).
11. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXIII.1 (Wynngaert, 463–64; Yule, vol. 2, 192–95). For a vivid account of later thirteenth-century Hangzhou, partly dependent on Marco Polo but drawing more on Chinese sources, see Gernet, *Daily Life in China*, 22–58.
12. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 22 (Deluz, 359).
13. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXV.2 (Wynngaert, 470; Yule, vol. 2, 211). On Hangzhou restaurants, see Gernet, *Daily Life in China*, 49–51.
14. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 22 (Deluz, 365–66).
15. “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan,” ed. Jacquet, 59–60, 67 (Yule, vol. 3, 89–90, 98–99).
16. “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan,” ed. Jacquet, 64–65 (Yule, vol. 3, 95–96).
17. “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan,” ed. Jacquet, 65–66 (Yule, vol. 3, 97).
18. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, paras. 125–26, 130–31 (Gadrat, 261, 262; Yule, 46–47).
19. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 160 (Gadrat, 265; Yule, 55).
20. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 23 (Deluz, 373); Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 172; Jones and Hammond, 36). Indeed, this proverb was widely repeated among medieval and Renaissance travelers (Clavijo was another from our period): Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Late Medieval Ambassadors and the Practice of Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1250–1450,” in *The “Book” of Travels*, Brummett, 37–112, at 40–55.
21. Marignolli, *Relatio* (Wynngaert, 536; Yule, vol. 3, 228–29).
22. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 160–61; Jones and Hammond, 17–18).
23. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, esp. chs. 75–104 (Ronchi, 400–450; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 185–255).
24. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 85 (Ronchi, 419–21; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 212–13). For a plan of the city, see Rossabi, “Reign of Khubilai Khan,” 456.
25. On the building of Khanbaliq, see Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, 131–35 and Yi-Fu Tuan, *A Historical Geography of China* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2008), 132–35. For Polo’s description of Quinsai, see *Divisament*, ch. 152 (Ronchi, 513–19; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 326–41).
26. Jacques le Goff, “L’apogée de la France urbaine médiévale, 1150–1330,” in *La ville médiévale des Carolingiens à la Renaissance*, ed. Jacques le Goff in *Histoire de la France urbaine*, ed. Georges Duby, 5 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 1980), vol. 2, 189–405 (esp. 387–96); also his *The Town as an Agent of Civilisation, c. 1200–c. 1500*, trans. Edmund King, Fontana Economic History of Europe, vol. 1 (London: Collins, 1971). See also J. K. Hyde, “Mediaeval Descriptions of Cities,” *Journal of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1965–66): 308–40; Chiara Frugoni, *A Distant City: Images of Urban Experience in the Medieval World*, trans. William McCuaig (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Keith Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages, 1000–1450* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 138–77; and Keith D. Lilley, *City and Cosmos: The Medieval World in Urban Form* (London: Reaktion, 2009).
27. J. C. Russell, *The Control of Late Ancient and Medieval Population* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1985), 8.
28. Jacques le Goff, *Medieval Civilization, 400–1500*, trans. Julia Barrow (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 293. Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), 243–99 offers an evocative if romantic overview of medieval urban development. More specialist accounts are supplied in David Nicholas’s two volumes, *The Growth of the Medieval City: From Late Antiquity to the Early Fourteenth Century* (Harlow: Longman, 1997) and *The Later Medieval City, 1300–1500* (Harlow: Longman, 1997).
29. Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization*, 293. Other historians come up with different totals (which is not surprising given the lack of reliable quantitative data from the period), often claiming a higher Parisian population of up to two hundred thousand but otherwise the general picture remains the same; e.g., J. C. Russell, *Population in Europe, 500–1500*, Fontana Economic History of Europe, vol. 1 (London: Collins, 1969), 17.
30. Frederick W. Mote, “Chinese Society Under Mongol Rule, 1215–1368,” in *Cambridge History of China*, ed. Franke and Twitchett, vol. 6, 618; Tuan, *Historical Geography of China*, 134; Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, “populous” quote at 43; on wealth and sophistication under the Song, see 78.
31. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 152 (Ronchi, 519; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 339).
32. Gérard Sivéry, “Rural Society,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History V, c. 1198–c.*

1300, ed. David Abulafia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38; Jean-Pierre Leguay, "Urban Life," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History VI, c. 1300–c. 1415*, ed. Michael Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 103–4.

33. Lilley, *Urban Life*, 138–77, esp. 163–67 on urban design and Christian cosmology; further explored in *City and Cosmos*, esp. 95–128.

34. Rupert of Deutz, *De Incendio*, ed. Herbert Grundmann, "Der Brand von Deutz 1128 in der Darstellung Abt Ruperts von Deutz," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 22 (1966): 385–71 chs. 10–12 (45–56). See John H. van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 248–61; Richard of Devizes, *Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. J. A. Giles (London: H. G. Bohn, 1848), 49–50; le Goff, *Town as an Agent of Civilisation*, 6–7.

35. Jacques le Goff, "Warriors and Conquering Bourgeois: The Image of the City in Twelfth-Century French Literature," in *The Medieval Imagination*, 151–76.

36. *Ibid.*, 169–71, quote at 171.

37. Augustine of Hippo, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson, introduction by John O'Meara (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), esp. 593–97; Otto, Bishop of Freising, *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A.D.*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow, foreword and updated bibliography by Karl F. Morrison, ed. Austin P. Evans and Charles Knapp (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 93.

38. Hyde, "Mediaeval Descriptions of Cities," 311–13 on the *Laudes Mediolanensis Civitatis* and passim on the genre in general.

39. William Fitzstephen, preface to his biography of St. Thomas Becket, transcribed in many places including Henry Thomas Riley, ed., *Munimenta Gildhallæ Londoniensis; Liber Albus; Liber Custumarum, et Liber Horn*, Rolls Series, no. 12, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1860), vol. 2, 2–15. See John Scattergood, "Misrepresenting the City: Genre, Intertextuality and William Fitzstephen's *Description of London* (c. 1173)," in *London and Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Julia Boffey and Pamela King (London: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1995), 1–34.

40. See, for example, Abigail Wheatley's discussion of Troy in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English works of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries: *The Idea of the Castle in Medieval England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), 59–63.

41. Bonvesin della Riva, "De Magnalibus Urbis Mediolani," translated as "On the Marvels of the City of Milan," in *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World: Illustrative Documents Translated with Introductions and Notes*, ed. Robert S. Lopez and Irving W. Raymond (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 60–69. Hyde, "Mediaeval Descriptions of Cities," 327–29, quote at 329.

42. On mendicants and towns, see le Goff, *Town as an Agent of Civilization*, 12–13.

43. On the Mongol elements in Khubilai's Khanbaliq, including tents, see Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, 133.

44. Jacques le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); also his *Town as an Agent of Civilization*, 20–21.

45. Le Goff, "Warriors and Conquering Bourgeois," 14–55.

46. Quoted in *ibid.*, 157.

47. *Ibid.*, 157, 161. William follows the footsteps of his father, Aimeri, whose capture of the Saracen city of Narbonne was also mythologized in the chansons: "The king gazed at the town and desired it in his heart" (le Goff, *Medieval Civilization*, 295).

48. Riccold, *Pérégrination*, 6va—vb (Kappler, 78), my translation.

49. Rubruck, *Relatio*, II.1 (Wyngaert, 172; Jackson, 72). Rubruck is alluding to Hebrews 13:14: "For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come."

50. Rubruck, *Relatio*, XIX.4, XXXII.1 (Wyngaert, 212, 285; Jackson, 131, 221).

51. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 3.1 (Kohler, vol. 2, 147; Burger, 26).

52. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 3.12 (Kohler, vol. 2, 160; Burger, 34).

53. Critchley, *Marco Polo's Book*, 103–7.

54. Jones, "Image of the Barbarian."

55. Jacques le Goff, "The Wilderness in the Medieval West," in *The Medieval Imagination*, 47–59 quote at 58.

56. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 96 (Ronchi, 439–46 Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 238–40).

57. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 1.1 (Kohler, vol. 2, 121; Burger, 7–8); "Book of the Estate of the Great Caan," ed. Jacquet, 66 (Yule, vol. 3, 97–98); Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 25 (Deluz, 396–97).

58. Peter Spufford, *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 176–78, 267–71.
59. Ibid., 201, 339–62. Also Nathan Sussman, “The Late Medieval Bullion Famine Reconsidered,” *Journal of Economic History* 58 (1998): 126–54.
60. Spufford, *Money and Its Use*, 254–63.
61. Ibid., 345.
62. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 98 (Ronchi, 443–46; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 243–47, quote at 244). A study of the Mongol *yām* postal system forms one chapter in Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 141–64.
63. “Book of the Estate of the Great Caan,” ed. Jacquet, 62 (Yule, vol. 3, 92); Odoric, *Relatio*, XXVII (Wyngaert, 477–78; Yule, vol. 2, 232–33); Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 25 (Deluz, 399–400).
64. Peter Spufford, *Power and Profit: The Merchant in Medieval Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 25–29, quote at 25. See also Rosalind Kent Berlow, “Development of Business Techniques at the Fairs of Champagne (end 12th century–13th century),” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 8 (1971): 3–23.
65. Spufford, *Power and Profit*, 27–28; see “The Diary of Buonaccorso Pitti,” in *Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence*, ed. Gene Brucker, trans. Julia Martines (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 49.
66. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 75 (Ronchi, 400–401; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 185–87).
67. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 84 (Ronchi, 416–19; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 207–11 at 208).
68. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 84, Ramusio addition (Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 210).
69. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXVI.1–4 (Wyngaert, 471–73; Yule, vol. 2, 215–22).
70. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXVI.4–11 (Wyngaert, 473–76; Yule, vol. 2, 222–29).
71. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXIX–XXX (Wyngaert, 479–82; Yule, vol. 2, 237–40).
72. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 23 (Deluz, 370–77).
73. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 23 (Deluz, 375).
74. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 25 (Deluz, 389–402).
75. Revelation 21:18. See Jill Mann, “Allegorical Buildings in Medieval Literature,” *Medium Aevum* 63 (1994): 191–210 esp. 193–95. On Prester John’s palace, see Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations Through Eight Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 161–69.
76. For example, R. K. Emmerson, *The Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981).
77. Frankl, *Gothic*, 163.
78. *Letter of Prester John*, sections 56–99 (Zarncke, 96–24; Uebel, 158–60).
79. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 30 (Deluz, 438–39).
80. Witte, *Itinerarius* (Westrem, 134–41; trans. 213–19).
81. Kathryn Reyerson and Faye Powe, eds., *The Medieval Castle: Romance and Reality* (Dubuque, IA: Centre for Medieval Studies, 1984); Charles L. H. Coulson, *Castles in Medieval Society: Fortresses in England, France, and Ireland in the Central Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Wheatley, *Idea of the Castle*.
82. Graham D. Keevill, *Medieval Palaces: An Archaeology* (Stroud: Tempus, 2000), 18, finds the purposes of a palace were chiefly residential, ceremonial, and administrative. For comments on the German twelfth-century context, see Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2000), 103–12.
83. Keevill, *Medieval Palaces*, 18.
84. Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 110.
85. Ibid., 115–21.
86. Ibid., 178–99.
87. Malcolm Vale, *The Princely Court: Medieval Courts and Culture in North-West Europe 1270–1380* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 168, citing some relevant secondary literature.
88. James R. Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence: Magnificence and Splendour in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), esp. 1–4.
89. Among others, A. D. Fraser Jenkins, “Cosimo de’ Medici’s Patronage of Architecture

and the Theory of Magnificence,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 162–70; Louis Green, “Galvano Fiamma, Azzone Visconti, and the Revival of the Classical Theory of Magnificence,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53 (1990): 98–113; Georgia Clarke, “Magnificence and the City: Giovanni II Bentivoglio and Architecture in Fifteenth-Century Bologna,” *Renaissance Studies* 13 (1999): 397–411; and Lindow, *Renaissance Palace*, 9–11.

90. Lindow, *Renaissance Palace*, 43–76.

91. *Ibid.*, 99–118.

92. *Ibid.*, 27, 28, 31.

93. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 86 (Ronchi, 421–23; Moule and Pelliott, vol. 1, 217–20).

94. Discussed in Kim M. Phillips, “The Invisible Man: Body and Ritual in a Fifteenth-Century Noble Household,” *Journal of Medieval History* 31 (2005): 143–62.

95. Vale, *Princely Court*, 202–6.

96. Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 4–5.

97. Otto Cartillieri, *The Court of Burgundy: Studies in the History of Civilization*, trans. Malcolm Letts (London: Kegan Paul, 1929), 64–65; Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*, esp. 16–17.

98. Robert Muchembled, “Manners, Courts, and Civility,” in *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, ed. Guido Ruggiero (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 156–72.

99. For example, Walter Prevenier and Wim Blockmans, *The Burgundian Netherlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 223–25; David Nicholas, “In the Pit of the Burgundian Theater State: Urban Traditions and Princely Ambitions in Ghent, 1360–1420,” in *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 271–95; Gordon Kipling, *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Andrew Brown, “Bruges and the Burgundian ‘Theatre State’: Charles the Bold and Our Lady of the Snow,” *History* 84 (1999): 573–89.

100. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 166; Jones and Hammond, 25).

101. Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, vol. 1, 244–55. See above, 63–64.

CHAPTER 8

1. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *De generis humani varietate nativa*, 3rd ed. (Gottingen, 1795), in *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, trans. Thomas Bendyshe, Publications of the Anthropological Society of London (London: Longman et al., 1865), section 4, 270, note 1; Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 275). For an accessible summary of Blumenbach’s contribution to racial theory, see Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 205–13.

2. Blumenbach, *De generis humani varietate nativa*, trans. Bendyshe, 266. Potentially confusingly, Blumenbach insists that the people *he* terms Tartars should not be confused with Yvo’s “Tartars” (269–70). The latter belong to the Mongol group, while Blumenbach’s Tartars are identified as Caucasian and presumably dwell to the west of the Ob. However, it is clear that Blumenbach perceived Yvo’s Tartars to belong within his “Mongol” group.

3. Hannaford, *Race*, 203, 59; Michael James, “Race,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/race> (first published Wednesday, 28 May 2008).

4. “The Race Question,” *UNESCO and Its Programme* 3 (1950): 1–11, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001282/128291eo.pdf> (accessed 1 April 2009). On the lack of genetic bases for “racial” characteristics, see, among others, Naomi Zack, *Philosophy of Science and Race* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 172–81; and Joseph L. Graves Jr., *The Emperor’s New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 140–51.

5. Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 197; Robert Bartlett, “Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 39–56, quote at 41, though more recently he has used “ethnicity”: “Illustrating Ethnicity in the Middle Ages,” in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 132–56.

6. Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, 64–86. An earlier version is Lisa Lampert, “Race, Periodicity, and the (Neo-) Middle Ages,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 65

(2004): 391–421. See also the articles in the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* special issue on “Race in the Middle Ages,” 31 (2001), especially (in addition to Bartlett’s piece already cited) Thomas Hahn, “The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race Before the Modern World,” 1–37; Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment”; and Linda Lomperis, “Medieval Travel Writing and the Question of Race,” 147–64. See also Sylvia Huot, “Love, Race, and Gender in Medieval Romance: Lancelot and the Son of the Giantess,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37 (2007): 373–91 and Jesus Montaña, “Sir Gowther: Imagining Race in Late Medieval England,” in *Meeting the Foreign*, ed. Classen, 118–32. Earlier work includes Kruger, “Conversion”; and Jenny Jochens, “Race and Ethnicity in the Old Norse World,” *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 30 (1999): 70–103.

7. On German, English, and Iberian colonial ideologies, see Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 236–42. On Spain, see John Edwards, “Beginnings of a Scientific Theory of Race? Spain, 1450–1600,” in *From Iberia to Diaspora: Studies in Sephardic History and Culture*, ed. Yedida K. Stillman and Norman K. Stillman, Brill’s Series in Jewish Studies, 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 179–96; also John Edwards, “Race and the Spanish Inquisition,” *Medieval History*, n.s., 1 (2002): 59–66 and David Nirenberg, “Was There Race Before Modernity? The Example of ‘Jewish’ Blood in Late Medieval Spain,” in *Origins of Racism*, ed. Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler, 232–64. Alternatively, Heng suggests the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) as an alternative point of origin for European racial thinking (*Empire of Magic*, 70–71).

8. Charles de Miramon, “Noble Dogs, Noble Blood: The Invention of the Concept of Race in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Origins of Racism*, ed. Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 200–216; Gianfranco Contini, “I più antichi esempi di ‘Razza,’” *Studi di Filologia Italiana* 17 (1959): 319–27; Francesco Sabatini, “Conferme per l’etimologia di *razza* dal francese antico *haraz*,” *Studi di Filologia Italiana* 20 (1962): 365–82.

9. Bartlett, “Medieval and Modern Concepts,” vividly illustrates the problems faced by translators of medieval terms for peoples, though (as mentioned already) he prefers “race” over “ethnicity.” See also William Chester Jordan, “Why Race?” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 165–73.

10. Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” esp. 115–16. His point is further elaborated in his *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity*, 16–34. The Cadden passage is in Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 163–64 and n.165.

11. Start with Marian J. Tooley, “Bodin and the Mediaeval Theory of Climate,” *Speculum* 28 (1953): 64–83 and Peter Biller, “Proto-racial Thought in Medieval Science,” in *Origins of Racism*, ed. Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler, 157–80. See also Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment”; Irina Metzler, “Perceptions of Hot Climate in Medieval Cosmography and Travel Literature,” *Reading Medieval Studies* 23 (1997): 60–105, esp. 75–79 (reprinted in *Medieval Ethnographies*, ed. Rubiés, 379–415); Akbari, “From Due East to True North”; Akbari, *Idols*, 140–54 (on Jews) and 155–63 (on Saracens); and Valentin Groebner, “Complexio/Complexion: Categorizing Individual Natures, 1250–1600,” in *The Moral Authority of Nature*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 361–83. Relevant studies of early modern contexts include Joyce E. Chaplin, “Natural Philosophy and an Early Racial Idiom in North America: Comparing English and Indian Bodies,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54 (1997): 229–52 and *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); cf. Mark S. Dawson, “Humouring Racial Encounters in the Anglo-Atlantic, c. 1580–1720,” in *Old Worlds, New Worlds*, ed. Bailey, Diggelmann, and Phillips, 139–61.

12. “locus est principium generationis, quaemadmodum et pater”: Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus*, IV.iv.5 (Bridges, vol. 1, 138; Burke, vol. 1, 159), quoting Porphyry. Bacon later reproduces the first part of this statement along with a fuller account of the value of geographical knowledge that cites Rubruck’s contribution to his own learning: IV.iv.16 (Bridges, vol. 1, 301–4; Burke, vol. 1, 320–23).

13. Tooley, “Bodin and the Mediaeval Theory,” 65–66, 68.

14. *Ibid.*, 70, 73. Ancient authorities had discussed differences between European and “Asian” bodies but not reaching further than the “Scythians” (see Biller, “Proto-racial Thought,” 157).

15. Tooley, “Bodin and the Mediaeval Theory,” 72–73.

16. 16. Akbari, *Idols*, 142–46, quote at 140 (italics in original). However, she also explores at some length ways in which climatological thinking did not provide a simple template for

perceptions of other bodies (e.g., 147–54, 155–99). Her examples include *The King of Tars*, a romance that has come into scholarly prominence in the past decade because of its exceptionally stark depiction of conceptual relationships between dark pigmentation and infidelism, miscegenation, and abject hybridity. See, among others, Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 227–37; Kruger, “Conversion,” 164–65; Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” 121; Hahn, “Difference the Middle Ages Makes,” 15; Siobhain Bly Calkin, “Marking Religion on the Body: Saracens, Categorization and *The King of Tars*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104 (2005): 219–38; and Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, 75–76.

17. Hahn, “Difference the Middle Ages Makes,” 11.

18. *John Trevisa's Translation of "Bartholomaeus Anglicus, De proprietatibus rerum?"* IV.x (vol. 1, 159).

19. *John de Foxtons Liber Cosmographiae (1408): An Edition and Codicological Study*, ed. John B. Friedman (Brill: Leiden, 1988), liv, fig. 3.

20. Bacon, *Opus Majus*, IV.iv.16 (Bridges, vol. 1, 304–5; Burke, vol. 1, 323–24).

21. “Especially in the northern regions I shall follow the friar mentioned above, whom the lord king of France, Louis, sent to the Tartars in the year of our Lord 1253, who traversed the regions of the East and of the north, and wrote these facts to the aforesaid illustrious king. I have examined this book with care, and I have conferred with its author, and likewise with many others who have explored the places of the East and South.” Bacon, *Opus Majus*, IV.iv.16 (Bridges, vol. 1, 305; Burke, vol. 1, 324).

22. For Bacon’s description of lands and peoples east of the Holy Land, see *Opus Majus* IV.iv.16 (Bridges, vol. 1, 350–74; Burke, vol. 1, 369–89), and for his argument for the importance and complexity of astrology, see pages later in the same chapter (Bridges, vol. 1, 376–404; Burke, vol. 1, 391–418).

23. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 3, 488; Giles, vol. 1, 131).

24. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 76–77; Giles, vol. 1, 312–13), translation modified.

25. For example, the letter of Henry, Count of Lorraine, to his father-in-law, the Duke of Brabant, (Giles, vol. 1, 339–41); and quoting Peter, “an archbishop of Russia,” with more cultural but not physical description (Giles, vol. 2, 28–31).

26. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, Additamenta 46 (Luard, vol. 6, 76; Giles, vol. 3, 449–50).

27. “sunt enim corpore terribiles, vultu furiosi, oculis iracundi, minibus rapaces, dentibus sanguinolenti, et eorum fauces ad carnem hominum comedendam et humanum sanguinem absorbendum omni tempore sunt paratae”: Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, Additamenta 47 (Luard, vol. 6, 77; Giles, vol. 3, 451).

28. Ivo of Narbonne, letter to Gerald, Archbishop of Bordeaux, in Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 272 ; Giles, vol. 1, 469), translation slightly modified.

29. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 275–77; Giles, vol. 1, 471–73).

30. “Egressa enim dudum ex ultimis mundi finibus de regione Australi, quae diu sole sub torrida zona tosta latuerat, quae postea versus partes Boreales occupatis violentior regionibus diu manens ut brucus multiplicatur, gens barbarae nationis et vitae, quo nescimus a loco vel origine, Tartari nuncupata”: Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 112; Giles, vol. 1, 341).

31. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 4, 115; Giles, vol. 1, 344).

32. See, for example, Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* (Luard, vol. 3, 488; Giles, vol. 1, 131).

33. Carpini, *Historia*, Prologue 2, I.3 (Menestò, 227, 229; Dawson, 3, 5).

34. Tooley, “Bodin and the Mediaeval Theory,” 77 (also 75 for northern temperament).

35. See also Joseph Ziegler, “Physiognomy, Science, and Proto-Racism, 1200–1500,” in *Origins of Racism*, ed. Eliav—Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler, 181–99 at 187, for paucity of references to Tartars in contemporary physiognomic texts.

36. Carpini, *Historia*, II.2 (Menestò, 232; Dawson, 6).

37. Carpini, *Historia*, XIII.14 (Menestò, 301; Dawson, 49); Lungarotti, “Le due redazioni,” 81.

38. *Tartar Relation*, para. 36 (Önnerfors, 24; Skelton, Marston, and Painter, 86).

39. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 26 (Deluz, 410).

40. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XIX.6 (Wyngaert, 214; Jackson, 132). In this passage Rubruck compares Batu’s physique to that of John of Beaumont, who was among Louis IX’s

chamberlains, but as Jackson regretfully remarks (132n4) historians have found no record of Beaumont's height.

41. Bacon, *Opus Majus*, IV.iv.16 (Bridges, vol. 1, 400; Burke, vol. 1, 416). Alternatively, it is possible this perspective was gleaned from Carpini's *Historia*.

42. Riccold, *Pérégrination*, 6va (Kappler, 78).

43. "Ipsi sunt nigri et adusti, sed regio eorum est temperatissima": Riccold, *Pérégrination*, 8va (Kappler, 92), my translation.

44. Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden*, 209–15.

45. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 64–70 (Ronchi, 380–93; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 161–77).

46. "il est de belle grandesse, ne petit ne grant, mes est de meçaine grandesse; il est carnu de bieles maineres; il est trop bien taliés de toutes membres. Il a son vis blanche et vermoille come rose; les iaus noir et biaux; les nes bien fait et bien seant": Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 82 (Ronchi, 414; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 204).

47. Strickland, "Artists, Audience, and Ambivalence," 510. Strickland's article is also essential for consideration of visual representations of eastern peoples in Marco Polo manuscripts.

48. Strickland, "Text, Image, and Contradiction," 33.

49. London, BL MS Royal 19 D.1, fols. 61, 65, 76, 77v, 78v, 83, 85, 86, 88.

50. Paris, Bib. Nat. MS Fr. 2810, fols. 2v, 3v, 25v, 36, 39, 52v, 78, 84, 106, 108v, 136v, 188, 198, 207, 228, 255, 276, 277.

51. These images are reproduced and discussed in Leonardo Olschki, "Asiatic Exoticism in Italian Art of the Early Renaissance," *Art Bulletin* 26 (1944): 95–106 and Lach, *Asia in the Making*, vol. 1, 72–73.

52. On the black Muslims of Ormuz, see *Divisament*, ch. 37 (Ronchi, 348; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 124); on the Kashmiris, see "Il sunt brun et maigri; les femes sunt mout belles selonc fames brunes. ... Elle est tenpre terre, que ne 1 a trop chaut, ne trop froit": Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 49 (Ronchi, 363; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 140).

53. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 48 (Ronchi, 362; Moule and Pelliot vol. 1, 139).

54. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 176 (Ronchi, 566; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 400).

55. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 176 (Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 400).

56. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 176 (Ronchi, 566; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 400).

57. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 180 (Ronchi, 580; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 415–16).

58. "Hii autem nigri sunt sarracenia, qui Ethiopes nominantur." He also says the king of the country, against whom Chinggis made war, is "commonly called Prester John": Carpini, *Historia*, V.12 (Menestò, 258; Dawson, 22).

59. "e sono non apostutto neri, uvero ulivigni, e mouto bene formati, chosi le femine chome li omini": see Monte Corvino, *Epistola* 1 (Wyngaert, 343; Yule, vol. 3, 63–64), my translation.

60. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, paras. 23, 63 (Gadrat, 247, 252; Yule, 12, 25). He also says inhabitants of Greater India are all black: Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 64 (Gadrat, 253; Yule, 26); see also para. 82 (Gadrat, 255; Yule, 32).

61. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 1.6 (Kohler, vol. 2, 126; Burger, 12).

62. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 162; Jones and Hammond, 20), emphasis added.

63. For example, Bib. Nat. fr. 2810, fols. 84, 106; the pearl fishers are in Bodley 264, fol. 265r.

64. Marignolli, *Relatio* (Yule, vol. 3, 245, section not included in Wyngaert edition). On the tradition of monstrous peoples as descendants of Cain, see Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 31, 93–103.

65. Carpini, *Historia*, V.14 (Menestò, 261; Dawson, 23); also *Tartar Relation*, para. 19 (Önnerfors, 14; Skelton, Marston, and Painter, 72); Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXVI.3–4 (Wyngaert, 234; Jackson, 158–59).

66. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 113 (Gadrat, 260; Yule, 43).

67. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 192 (Ronchi, 596–97; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 432–33). There is no indication that Polo visited Zanzibar; perhaps he heard tales from Muslim traders. Scholars have noted that European Christian defamation of black Africans and association of black Africans and natural slavery had precursors in Islamic works of the medieval period: see David M. Goldenberg, "The Development of the Idea of Race: Classical Paradigms and

Mediaeval Elaborations" (review article on Hannaford, *Race*), *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 5 (1999): 561–70.

68. Mandeville, *Livre*, chs. 7, 17 (Deluz, 149, 304). The environment has further effects on Ethiopians' bodies, as the poor-quality salty water affects appetites, causes flux of the womb, and shortens lives. Among the "diverse" people are folk with one large foot to use as a sunshade.

69. Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. Seymour, vol. 2, 752–73; Akbari, *Idols*, 41–46 (see Chapter 3, note 58); Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 218 (217 in Moule and Pelliot) (Ronchi, 641–42; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 473, emphasis added).

70. Carpini, *Historia*, V.10 (Menestò, 258; Dawson, 22).

71. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXVI.9 (Wyngaert, 236; Jackson, 161).

72. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 72 (Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 180–81).

73. For Succiu, see Marco Polo, *Divisament*, Z version, ch. 61 (Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 158); for Toloman, see *Divisament*, ch. 129 (Ronchi, 487; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 298).

74. Hetoum, *La flor*, bk. 1.1 (Kohler, vol. 2, 121; Burger, 7).

75. "Hii homines satis sunt corpore pulchri, pallidi tamen, habentes barbem ita rarum et longam sicut murilege, id est gate. Mulieres vero pulcerrime sunt de mundo": Odoric, *Relatio*, XIX.2 (Wyngaert, 458; Yule, vol. 2, 179), translation modified.

76. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 22 (Deluz, 359–60).

77. Poggio, *De varietate fortunae*, vol. 4 (Merisalo, 166; Jones and Hammond, 26).

78. Gaspar, *Treatise*, trans. Boxer, 137.

79. "The people are white, fair fashioned, and beautiful [Les gens sont blanches, de beles maineres e biaux]": Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 159 (Ronchi, 531; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 357).

80. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 18 (Deluz, 312).

81. Paul H. D. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985); Jean Devisse, *From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery": From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood*, vol. 2, pt. 1 of *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, ed. Ladislav Bugner (Cambridge, MA: Menil Foundation, 1979), esp. 55–80, 161–86; Frank M. Snowden Jr., *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 99–108; Hahn, "Difference the Middle Ages Makes"; Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment"; Carolyn Dinshaw, "Pale Faces: Race, Religion, and Affect in Chaucer's Texts and Their Readers," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 19–41; Bruce Holsinger, "The Color of Salvation: Desire, Death, and the Second Crusade in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*," in *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*, ed. David Townsend and Andrew Taylor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 156–86.

82. Groebner, "Complexio/Complexion," 380; Dawson, "Humouring Racial Encounters," 158–61.

83. Hannaford, *Race*, 210.

84. Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Paul Turner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 40.

85. Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 37.

86. Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 174.

87. Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 59–86, 88–89.

88. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Bettenson, XVI.8 (662). However, see also Friedman's comments in *Monstrous Races*, 92.

89. Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 87–107, quote at 89.

90. Ibid., 108–9. The Greek term was *teras*. Roman writers used terms *monstrum*, *portentum*, *prodigium*, and *ostentum* more or less interchangeably to refer to earthly rather than heavenly prodigies (111). For Isidore, see 112–16, and *Etymologiae*, bk. 11, where he makes the link with *monitus*.

91. Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 163–71.

92. Ibid., 131, 141, 154–62.

93. David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996).

94. Cohen, *Of Giants*, quotes at xii, xv; Lacan, *Seminar, Book VII*, 71.

95. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, "Introduction: Conceptualizing the Monstrous," in *The Monstrous Middle Age*, ed. Bildhauer and Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 6. See also 219–26 in the same volume for a helpful survey of existing scholarship.

96. Carpini, *Historia*, V.6 (Menestò, 254; Dawson, 20).
97. Carpini, *Historia*, V.13 (Menestò, 259–60; Dawson, 23).
98. *Tartar Relation*, para. 18 (Önnerfors, 13–14; Skelton, Marston, and Painter, 70–72).
99. Carpini, *Historia*, V.30 (Menestò, 272; Dawson, 30).
100. *Tartar Relation*, para. 21 (Önnerfors, 15–16; Skelton, Marston, and Painter, 74).
101. Carpini, *Historia*, V.31 (Menestò, 272–73; Dawson, 30–31). See also *Tartar Relation*, para. 21 (Önnerfors, 15–16; Skelton, Marston, and Painter, 74).
102. Carpini, *Historia*, V.33 (Menestò, 273–4; Dawson, 31); *Tartar Relation*, para. 21 (Önnerfors, 15–16; Skelton, Marston, and Painter, 74).
103. Benedict the Pole, *Relatio* (Wyngaert, 138; Dawson, 80–81).
104. Gandsaketsi, “Journey of Haithon,” 168.
105. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXIX.46 (Wyngaert, 269; Jackson, 201).
106. See Monte Corvino, Epistola 1 (Wyngaert, 342; Yule, vol. 3, 62).
107. Jordan, *Mirabilia*, para. 78 (Gadrat, 255; Yule, 30–31).
108. Odoric, *Relatio*, VII.3 (Wyngaert, 422). Note that Yule’s translation, 112–13, omits this passage, calling it “untranslatable.” Ludovico de Varthema describes the pearl fishers of Ormuz, who hung two bags around their necks for the collection of pearls from below the water; perhaps the giant scrotal sacs of Odoric’s (later Mandeville’s) account derive from these pearl bags: see *Itinerario*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 108. A Chinese traveler from 1252 also described the pearl fishers of the Persian Gulf and the bags attached to their loins by ropes to leave their hands free. Ch’ang Te, “Si Shi Ki,” vol. 1, 145–46.
109. Odoric, *Relatio*, XXIV.2 (Wyngaert, 468–69; Yule, 207–9). The tradition of eastern peoples who conceive at the age of five and die at eight derives from Pliny: Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 13. Odoric’s attention to the matter of whether pygmies (who were among the oldest monsters, mentioned in ancient texts ranging from Homer to the Book of Ezekiel) were rational *homines* is explained by the debate on the subject among scholastic philosophers including Albertus Magnus, who denied their humanity, placing them between humans and apes in the Great Chain of Being, saying they merely imitated reason, a view elaborated c. 1301 by Peter of Auvergne: Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 190–96.
110. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, ch. 166 (Ronchi, 544; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 373).
111. Marignolli, *Relatio* (Wyngaert, 545–46; Yule, vol. 3, 254–56).
112. Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk*, 11.
113. Marco Polo, *Divisament*, chs. 169, 172 (Ronchi, 547, 549; Moule and Pelliot, vol. 1, 376, 378). Lerner denies that the Andaman passage is a description of *cynocephali* but says it speaks merely of people who look a bit like dogs (*Marco Polo*, 82).
114. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 17 (Deluz, 304).
115. Mandeville, *Livre*, chs. 18, 22 (Deluz, 313–14, 364).
116. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 22 (Deluz, 357–59).
117. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 31 (Deluz, 448–51).
118. This reversal has also been observed in parts of Eastern Europe and Baltic countries: Barbara Freitag, *Sheela-na-Gigs: Unravelling an Enigma* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 96.
119. Mela says of some Thracians and the Getae that they are quite prepared to die, that dying is better than living, that childbirth and newborns are wept over while funerals are festive, and that wives fight among themselves over who will be killed beside their deceased husbands: *Mela’s Description of the World*, trans. Romer, vol. 2, 74.
120. Mandeville, *Livre*, ch. 32 (Deluz, 456–61).
121. Witte, *Itinerarius* (Westrem, 128–29; trans. 210).
122. Witte, *Itinerarius* (Westrem, 129–30; trans. 210–11).
123. Witte, *Itinerarius* (Westrem, 150–54; trans. 223–25).
124. Strickland, “Artists, Audience, and Ambivalence.”
125. Michael Camille, “‘For Our Devotion and Pleasure’: The Sexual Objects of Jean, Duc de Berry,” *Art History* 24 (2001): 169–94 at 169.
126. *Ibid.*, 169.
127. These woodcut illustrations are discussed in Mandeville, *Mandeville’s Travels*, ed. and trans. Letts, vol. 1, xxxviii–xxxix.
128. Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 115, 120–21.
129. Blumenbach, *De generis*, trans. Bendyshe, 257–59.
130. Mary Baine Campbell, “The Nude Cyclops in the Costume Book,” in *Marvels, Monsters*,

AFTERWORD

1. Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 6.

2. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*. Readers should be aware, though, that her sweeping thesis has received much criticism from both European and Asian specialists for its methods and errors of detail: see, for example, Donald A. Nielsen, “After World Systems Theory: Concerning Janet Abu-Lughod’s *Before European Hegemony*,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 4 (1991): 481–97, and Victor Lieberman, “Abu-Lughod’s Egalitarian World Order: A Review Article,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (1993): 544–50. A more recent survey in a similar vein is John M. Hobson, *Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

3. For example, Stewart Gordon, *When Asia Was the World: Traveling Merchants, Scholars, Warriors, and Monks Who Created the “Riches of the East”* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2008); Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules—for Now: The Patterns of History and What They Reveal About the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

4. Gaunt, “Can the Middle Ages Be Postcolonial?” 172–73.

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